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HOW TO BELIEVE

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IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN THE NINETEENTH  
CENTURY (*Thesis*)

# HOW TO BELIEVE

*The Questions That Challenge  
Man's Faith Answered in the  
Light of the Apostles' Creed*

BY

RALPH W. SOCKMAN, D.D.



DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.

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FIRST EDITION

*To my grandson*

BILLY

*in the hope that he will someday know  
what he believes as firmly as he now  
knows what he wants.*



## *Foreword*

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On a mission to Russia in 1946 I was struck by the contrast between the animated faces of the youth groups and the joyless expression of the adults. The Soviet officials had apparently succeeded in firing the boy in the sports club with confidence and zeal, but the glow had seemingly faded from the man on the street. While one should not generalize from a brief visit, I came to the conclusion that the high-powered communist propaganda is better at creating an attitude of faith than in supplying a content of faith.

Faith involves both an attitude of mind and a content of mind. It needs what William James in his well-worn phrase called "the will to believe," but it also needs beliefs to sustain the will to believe. And it is this second ingredient which communist philosophy in the long run lacks.

Herein lies hope for the ultimate triumph of the Judaeo-Christian religion over the communist appeal. It is one thing to say "Have faith"; it is another to be able to say "Have a faith." Karl Marx may give "a shot in the arm" which quickens the pulse of distressed peoples with expectancy, but the Bible builds up the blood stream of the mind and spirit with beliefs and attitudes which lead to redemption.

Yet in this postwar period of fear and tension we Americans have been trying to get the buoyancy of our religion without much attention to its beliefs. We have been reading the many books which extol the power of mind over body, poise which can relieve tension, the you-can-win complex to

conquer fear. But while this may be good as a start, it is not enough to keep us going. The Nazarene Coach of the Immortal Eleven did not merely keep calling: "Have faith; play up and play the game." He gave his disciples a reason for the faith he sought to impart. And that is what we need now.

Thoughtful persons realize this need. There are more courses in the field of religion being given today on American college campuses than ever before. Students are asking what they can believe and why.

By way of example, I might state that this book was inspired by the following lectures, which I gave in recent years: The James A. Gray<sup>1</sup> Lectures at Duke University in 1950; the Merrick Lectures at Ohio Wesleyan University in 1951; the Sam Jones Lectures at Emory University in 1952. It also reflects to a large degree the accumulation of my broadcasting experiences through the last twenty-five years. The two million and more letters received during the quarter of a century have revealed the concerns and perplexities of human souls across the continent. It is these I have had in mind, especially in the supplemental questions attached.

The Apostles' Creed has furnished the frame for our discussion. Although it is not a perfect and complete statement of the Christian faith, we have sought to enlarge its clauses to embrace briefly all the essential doctrines. We have not discussed the origin and history of the Creed itself, as that has been done by many scholars elsewhere. With its sixteen centuries of time-tested experience, the Apostles' Creed carries the stabilizing weight of tradition which our tense and flighty generation so sorely needs. Through its assertions of belief the centuries speak to the hours. It is repeated each Sunday by millions of worshipers, many of whom are un-

<sup>1</sup>It is with deep sorrow that I have just learned of Mr. Gray's death. His courage and vision will remain as a lasting epitaph.



certain about some of its statements. Churchmen have learned it by heart, but have they taken it to heart?

It would be impossible to acknowledge my indebtedness to all who have helped in the preparation of this volume. But I must mention the faculties of Duke University, Ohio Wesleyan University, and Emory University for their many courtesies during the delivery of the lectures; Marion M. Marcy, Helen V. Putnam, and Helen Stanbury for painstaking secretarial help; Dr. G. Paul Butler for his wise comments after reading the manuscript; Mrs. W. C. Stevens, Elizabeth Porter Beasley, Juliette Endly, and Geneva Helm for valued and voluntary research; and my wife, Zellah Endly Sockman, for her continuing counsel in the writing of the chapters and most of all for her patience with the author while he was writing them.

RALPH W. SOCKMAN

*New York, December 1, 1952*



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churches stress more the severity of God's judgment in order to curb the mounting lawlessness of men? How will God judge the person who takes his own life? If God is love, what does the Bible mean by "the fear of God"? If we appear before the Divine Judge at death, is his decision final? In view of life's frequent failures and frustrations is it true that "whatever a man sows that he will also reap"?

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## FURTHER QUESTIONS

When I hear about the Trinity, I can understand God as Father and God as Son in Jesus Christ, but why is the Holy Spirit so vague and hard to grasp? Can the Holy Spirit release powers in our minds which we cannot reach ourselves? Was the Holy Spirit at work in Old Testament times? If so, why does the New Testament speak of him as a gift sent after Christ's death? When we do not like to do what we feel we ought to do, can the Holy Spirit help us? Why did Jesus refer to the Holy Spirit as the Comforter and then say that he will "convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment"? Does he come to comfort or convict? Is there danger of relying so much on the Holy Spirit that we weaken our self-reliance? When I pray I seem to be talking to myself. What is prayer more than autosuggestion?

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## FURTHER QUESTIONS

I would like to know if the communion of saints can include sinners. Many Protestant churches are named for saints. Are there any Protestant saints? Why have so many sinners become saints? When a Protestant minister participates in the dedication of a Jewish synagogue is it a religious or a civil ceremony? Do you think the Protestant Church left or right? What is meant by the much-mentioned American doctrine of separation of church and state?

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#### FURTHER QUESTIONS

Will the little child who dies before baptism go to heaven? Does belief in immortality tend to lessen our work for a better world here? Should we pray for the dead? Does not the church stress the hope of heaven and the fear of hell in order to make people be good? My daughter died when she was four years old. That was over thirty years ago. Will she still be a little girl when I meet her, or will she be grown-up? I am so anxious about my husband. He does not attend church with me. In fact, he says he does not believe in God.



I love him and cannot endure the thought that we shall be separated in the life beyond. What am I to do? Does memory continue in the life after death? How can we explain death to a child? Can we receive communications from the dead?



HOW TO BELIEVE



## CHAPTER I

# *What Is Faith?*

---

"I believe in——"

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### HOW REAL IS FAITH?

What is faith? Measured by our mention of it, faith would seem to be the mind's most common commodity. We are ever speaking of "having faith" or "losing faith" or "keeping faith."

And while we use the word "faith" almost every hour of the day, we use faith itself every minute of the hour. We sit securely in our homes because we have faith in the structure of our dwellings. By faith we ride to our work; by faith we plan tomorrow's program; by faith we dine with our friends. Robert Louis Stevenson was right when he said that faith forms the axles of the universe.

When we talk about faith in connection with religion, we are referring to the same attitude of mind, the same principle of action which we use daily in home and office. Many make the mistake of not recognizing this fact. They think that when we turn to religious faith we are leaving the solid ground of reality for a dreamy region of make-believe. They assume that faith is a sort of prop for weak minds. They may even second the sneering remark of Madame de Stäel: "Have you not observed that faith is generally strongest in those whose character may be called the weakest?"

Not so. Faith is the working principle of daily living, manifest in the tiny tot crossing the street with her hand in her mother's or in a Columbus crossing the Atlantic when his only chart was one "which faith deciphered in the skies." Faith in some degree is the common heritage of the human race, and in highest degree is the peculiar gift of all noble spirits and the source of whatever bears the impress of greatness.

#### HOW IS FAITH RELATED TO HOPE?

Watch a little three-year-old child as she enters a room filled with strangers. She looks around with wide-eyed wonder. Her face puckers in puzzlement as she tries to take it all in. That is the expression we use: "She is taking it all in."

But her mind is more than a camera registering external impressions on an inner film. She is not only receiving; she is responding. She is thinking with assent or dissent. After a moment or two she makes up her mind and runs to her mother's arms. She has formed the judgment that her mother's knee is the best place to take her stand in that situation.

Moreover, the little girl's mind is not like a film being exposed for the first time. She comes into the room possessing beliefs and ideas. Though only three, the young lady already has a past. And it is affecting her present and future. She did not initiate her beliefs any more than she chose her parents. She acquired her ideas as she acquired her manners—by contagion. She was born into a world where she found people already believing and she made their beliefs her own. From parents and playmates she caught them and took them for granted. We are tattooed in our cradles with the beliefs of our tribe. Those beliefs are as much a part of the structure of her world as the ground on which she walks.

Furthermore, her little mind links what she sees in the

room with the future as well as the past. We are creatures who "look before and after and pine for what is not." The normal child has an expectant attitude.

Hope is essential to life. But it must be properly blended. We see the point of the old Roman saying, "Seize the day," for it is possible to become so preoccupied with hope for the future as well as with the fear of it that we take our attention off what is happening now. Nevertheless, while we should seize today, we simply cannot live wholly in the present. The mind looks ahead, and if it sees nothing, the heart fails. We could not live each day as if it were the last, with no expectation of a tomorrow, "For in this hope we were saved."<sup>1</sup>

But there are degrees of hope, ranging from faintness to confidence. One thinks of the boy returning from the fishing pond. When a neighbor asked, "Did you catch many fish today?" he replied, "I didn't catch as many as I hoped to, but I really didn't think I would!" Now that was faint hope, without real expectation. It was hope without faith.

Perhaps you have been suffering for a long time from a baffling ailment. You have tried various treatments under several physicians. Now you are about to try a new doctor and you say, "I hope he is going to help me." But your experience makes you skeptical. Hence, though hope springs eternal in your breast, it is feeble.

But suppose the situation is a bit different. You have a trusted physician who has treated you for years. He has brought you through many crises in health. Now a new disorder is giving you trouble and you have hurried back from your vacation to see this doctor who knows you. You say, "I have faith in him that he can help me." Your experience has begotten in you a confident hope. That is the attitude of faith.

When we apply this principle to our relations with God, we understand the secret of Saint Paul's hope when he said:

<sup>1</sup>Romans 8:24.

"... suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us."<sup>2</sup> To Paul, God was like a trusted physician whose treatment he had been taking through tribulation until he had learned to be patient and out of that experience had developed a confident hope.

Here is to be noted a very convincing and heartening fact. This confident kind of hope which "does not disappoint us" is the result of testing and not a mere native gift or natural temperament. The "born optimist" who takes a roseate view of everything is not very trustworthy. But the testimony of religious experience is that those who might seem to have the most reason to distrust life because of its hardships are the ones who have come through with the strongest faith. It was a hard-bitten veteran of earth's warfare who buoyantly assures us that "faith, hope, love abide, these three."<sup>3</sup>

#### HOW DOES EXPECTANCY LEAD TO PROOF?

Moreover, while hope is thus seen as an end result of deep religious testing, it is also true that we must start with a certain amount of expectancy if we are to gain experience and give God a chance. Expectancy expands the receiving faculties. Suppose several persons are gathered in a room and one of them is expecting the arrival of a loved one. That person will hear the approaching car or footsteps before the others do. It makes a vital difference whether we listen and look expectantly or indifferently or skeptically.

Consider two men going to church. One goes with a negative mind which sees a difficulty in every opportunity. He looks at the people sitting in the pews around him and he thinks how imperfect they are. He hears the congregation stand to repeat a creed and he wonders how much of it they really believe. He listens to the sermon and knows how far

<sup>2</sup>Romans 5:3-5.

<sup>3</sup>Corinthians 13:13.



the minister comes from practicing what he preaches. His doubting attitude of mind draws negative thoughts until his little faith is still further lessened.

The other man goes to the same church. He sets the sails of his mind to catch whatever favoring winds may blow. He sees the congregation bowing in prayer and the sight makes him feel that there must be something real about such praying to keep people doing it down the ages. He looks at the church building and thinks how devout worshipers have sacrificed through the centuries to build shrines to God. Why did they do it? What made missionaries sacrifice to give the gospel to others? What made martyrs die for their faith? Why is it that the Bible outlasts all other books? These and other thoughts move upon his mind and he finds his faith and confidence mounting.

It is the same church, the same set of circumstances. The difference is in the minds of the two men, one negative and the other positive. This is the difference Jesus was stressing when he said: ". . . to every one who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away."<sup>4</sup> Jesus added that statement to his parable commending the positive faith of the two men who had the confidence to invest their pounds and thus gained more, and he was condemning the negative attitude of the fellow who buried his pound for safekeeping and lost it. Faith operates by the law of accumulation; lack of faith operates by the law of diminishing returns.

Observe it in any realm. The wise businessman weighs the situation before he makes his decisions, but when they are made, he sets forth with a will to believe in his enterprise, in his colleagues, in himself. With affirmative mind, he thinks positive thoughts.

Such an attitude is equally essential to friendship and love. We would get nowhere in personal relations if we re-

<sup>4</sup>Luke 19:26.

quired everyone to prove his good faith at every point before we made any advances. We accept a friend as true until he proves himself false.

In our American courts of law a person charged with a crime is considered innocent until he is proven guilty. In the Soviet Union and some other countries, the prisoner is assumed to be guilty until he proves himself innocent. Which principle, I ask you, seems to work better?

If in our business, our friendship, even our courts, we put our beliefs before our doubts, we must also do the same in the realm of religion. We should doubt our doubts before we doubt our beliefs.

Some years ago I sat by the bedside of a young man whom the jinx of misfortune had pursued with a long series of accidents. The pampered son of an adoring mother, he had not been hardy enough to take it. He said that he could see no evidence of God. One trouble with him was that his mind was in a position analogous to his body, that is, prone on its back. Lying on its back, his mind expected God to come and prove himself, but God cannot prove himself to skeptical and supine minds. He shows himself to those who set out expectantly like the demented child's father crying: "I believe; help my unbelief!"<sup>5</sup>

#### HOW MUCH MUST WE SEE IN ORDER TO BELIEVE?

Our bodies are so constructed that we move through space better going forward than backward. We front one way. This is a fact which the little girl discovered when she was trying to button her dress in the back. "How can I, Mother?" she cried. "I'm in front of myself." Our eyes, our arms, our feet work in the same direction, that is, forward. But in moving through time, our eyes cannot see what is ahead. We move into each new day as a man rows a boat.

<sup>5</sup>Mark 9:24.

His face is toward the wake rather than toward the prow. Hence we cannot depend wholly on our physical vision.

The so-called practical person says, "I'll believe it when I see it," or "Seeing is believing." Suppose all our ancestors had taken that attitude. There would then be no electric light whereby we could see to read these lines, because the electric light came into being through a man who was convinced in his mind before he saw with his eyes. Furthermore, if one had to see before he believed, there would have been no great inventor named Thomas Edison, for young Tom was so dull that teachers suggested taking him out of school. But he had a mother whose heart had eyes to see what others missed.

Moreover, there would have been no American culture to develop public schools and Thomas Edisons had it not been for a discoverer by the name of Columbus whose faith outran his sight. And to go further back, Columbus was the product of a Christian civilization which stemmed from Jesus of Nazareth, who said to a doubting disciple: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."<sup>6</sup> And Jesus was reared in a Jewish nation freed by the mighty leader Moses, of whom it was said that "he endured as seeing him who is invisible."<sup>7</sup>

When we trace this vaunted "practical" principle that we must see in order to believe, we find it leads to absurdity and stagnation. We might even revise the old saying, "Seeing is believing," and say, "Believing is seeing." The best and greatest things in life have been seen by those who first believed. Posterity honors the pioneers and explorers who go out before the maps are made and thereby make the maps. Even a fool can count the apples on a tree, but it takes foresight to count the trees in an apple.

Our five senses bring to us but a small fraction of the

<sup>6</sup>John 20:29.

<sup>7</sup>Hebrews 11:27.

values available in life. With the naked eye we can count only two thousand to four thousand stars on a clear night, while the sensitive photographic plate records them in millions. We lift up our windows in the quiet countryside and we say it is the "dead of night." Yet in that which seems to us unbroken silence the beasts of the field hear their signals. Our unaided eye and taste may declare to be pure water that which contains deadly germs.

To be sure, man has supplemented his physical senses with the most sensitive receiving instruments. With the telescope he adds a realm of existence which makes dizzy the imagination. With the microscope he multiplies the known number of man's fellow creatures beyond all dreams. And then with his scientific theories he projects his vision beyond the range of his physical perception into the region of atoms and electrons.

But beyond the reach of our scientifically supplemented senses is still a vast world of values. Thomas Hardy has two poignant passages where he comes within sight of this supersensible realm. In one, he is listening to a thrush singing and he wonders if there be a message of joy which it has heard but which has escaped him to whom the world looks so gray and bleak. In the other experience he is observing a congregation engaged in Christian worship. Unable to see what they see or to feel what they feel, he finds himself an unwilling outsider. Instruments may be able to make the ears of a Hardy as sensitive to sound as those of a thrush, but no mechanism can convey to him the secret of the bird's joy or of the congregation's emotion. That is a realm of value beyond the reach of physical senses, aided or unaided.

Our scientifically proven facts form only an island of charted knowledge surrounded by a vast ocean of mystery. The larger the island grows, the longer the shore line of the unknown. The more we know, the more modest we become because the more we realize what remains to be known. We

can tell the whole truth only when there is not much to tell. And the true learner's attitude is expressed by Baron von Hügel: "It is by not denying as false what I do not yet see to be true that I give myself the chance of growing insight."<sup>8</sup>

The attitude of faith is not only to keep the mind open toward the yet unseen, but also to cultivate the inner vision of the invisible. Such was the exercise to which Saint Paul gave himself: ". . . we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."<sup>9</sup> Thereby the invisible became so real to him that though his outer nature was wasting away his inner nature was renewed day by day.

Thus sight can be supplemented by insight and foresight. Then it is faith, "the conviction of things not seen."<sup>10</sup>

#### HOW DOES BELIEF BECOME TRUST?

We may believe a person and yet not believe in him. I think of an acquaintance who is possessed of a brilliant mind. He has an almost uncanny way of finding out the facts. And when he reports a situation to me, I believe him. I think he is telling me the truth but I do not quite believe in him. I do not feel like trusting myself to follow him in interpreting or applying the information which he gives me. That is, I do not have faith in him for faith involves trust.

Belief is assent; faith is consent and implies commitment. When we say, "I believe in God," we mean more than mere belief that God exists. We mean that we believe in God enough to trust him and to commit our way to him. One does not become assured of God simply by weighing the arguments for and against the possibility of his existence. A

<sup>8</sup>Friedrich von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses*, First Series (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1921), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>2 Corinthians 4:18.

<sup>10</sup>Hebrews 11:1.

conviction is a belief which has been personally appropriated and has become a determining factor in life. To acquire religious conviction the assent of the mind is not enough. The whole personality must take part, the will and the emotions as well as the intellect.

Faith is developed by action even more than by argument. We learn to trust only by trusting. There are regions in life where action must precede conviction, where we must commit ourselves before we can fully understand. Friendship is such a realm. If your friend invites you to dinner, you do not ask for a written guarantee that there is no poison in the food. If he invites you to ride with him in his car, he does not require you to sign a waiver releasing him from damages in case of accident. If your friend bids you to spend the night in his house, he does not put you under bond not to steal the valuables in the room. In short, a friend trusts himself to the fidelity of a friend. And this extension of faith, this taking of certain confidences for granted, applies in some degree to the associations of all gentlemen. Anyone who refused to associate with others on such a basis would cut himself off from friendly intercourse. Even in supposedly cynical Wall Street, millions of dollars change hands every hour by faith in the spoken word.

And this attitude of trust, so essential to human fellowship, is equally necessary in our relations with God. As Dr. Charles Wishart says, we must be gentlemen with God. The trust which saintly souls reveal, keeping them so sure of themselves and so serene amid the storms of adversity, such trust in God is born out of long practice and much commitment.

"Faith is not a sixth sense by which we apprehend realities for which we have no other evidence. It is a capacity which we possess as human beings of appreciating the true significance of the realities with which we are in contact at all times. . . . Without faith, no one of the great convic-

tions that make life worth living would be possible. . . . Through the intuitions that come to us in our best moments we perceive the harmony in individual things and appreciate their value and their meaning with an immediacy possible in no other way."<sup>11</sup>

Truth is not a mere commodity to be used by sovereign individuals for their own self-chosen interests. Truth is a sovereign which has to be served in order to be possessed. When Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?"<sup>12</sup> the Master did not deign to answer. Why try to explain truth to Pilate? He would not have followed it if he had seen it. He was merely a politician looking for an expedient way out of a predicament. If we would understand the truth, we must be willing to follow where it leads.

And we have to show that willingness before we can see through beyond the shadow of a doubt. The child in the home must obey his parents at some points before he comprehends all the reasons. The youth who would study violin cannot ask the teacher to explain his technique before he begins to study with him. He must give himself to the master if he would learn of him. The person who is ill does not go to a physician and say: "Doctor, I am consulting several physicians. I should like to have you diagnose my case and give me a prescription. Then I shall consider the various prescriptions and see which looks the best to me." No reputable doctor would deal with a case on such terms. He would tell his caller to go to some other doctor's office—or perhaps to some place less comfortable! A good physician requires his patient to submit to his regimen and give it a whole-hearted undivided trial. He does not try to explain his cure to the "wise" spectator; he demonstrates it to the willing patient.

<sup>11</sup>William Adams Brown, *Pathways to Certainty* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 120.

<sup>12</sup>John 18:38.

Hence Jesus was no more arbitrary than any other good teacher or physician when he said: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."<sup>18</sup> Obedience is one of the first steps in knowledge.

Winfred Rhoades was stricken early in a successful career with an illness lasting more than twenty years. Out of his pain and helplessness, which seemed to defy cure, Rhoades set his will, saying to himself, "It is more important to be like God than even to believe in God." After that came a second pregnant thought: "I will trust the universe in spite of sickness, pain, grief, frustration." To that he held as the fundamental article of his faith until he added a further development, namely this: "I will trust life." Life comes unsought. It develops self-consciousness and personality. Surely such a development can hardly have come into existence "as a mere bubble of chance upon the surging seas of time beginning without purpose, ending without reason." The universe which can beget human life must have essential reasonableness and integrity at its heart. Hence he would trust life. And in that trust he set himself to the business of "growing a soul."

And then, as he was growing his soul and groping for God, the words of Pascal came to his mind. Pascal had interpreted God as saying to man: "Thou wouldst not seek me if thou hadst not already found me." As Rhoades pondered that thought, the light began to break on his mind. Whence comes this restless searching after "the living God"? What makes this homesickness for a Heavenly Father, if somehow, somewhere, we had not had in our minds and hearts a touch of that home?

<sup>18</sup>Matthew 11:29.



## FURTHER QUESTIONS

**Does it matter what we believe as long as we do what is right?**

To be sure, we are judged by what we do far more than by what we believe. But belief and conduct are inseparably interdependent. What we do colors what we believe, and what we believe conditions our conduct and character. Our beliefs determine what we think is right. It is shallow thinking to say glibly, "Let conscience be your guide." The persecutors who stoned Saint Stephen, the Spanish Inquisitors who burned nonconformists at the stake, the Massachusetts Puritans who banished Roger Williams, were all conscientious and yet they were cruel. It requires an informed conscience to do what is right.

A person may sometimes have a clear conscience simply because his head is empty. He thinks that he is doing his duty but he has not taken the trouble to find out what his full duty is. A man may feel he is doing right when he tells the truth as he sees it, and yet he may do devilish damage because he does not find out the truth before he tells it.

God calls us to advance from good intentions to intelligent goodness.

**Can intelligent persons believe in the supernatural?**

If we use the word "natural" to cover those objects and processes which are studied and charted by the physical sciences, then the consciousness and conduct of persons are themselves literally supernatural.

After the Titanic disaster in 1912, an American paper carried two illustrations of the tragedy. One was a drawing of the beautiful new ship striking the iceberg and crumpling

like an eggshell. Underneath the picture were these words: "The Weakness of Man, the Supremacy of Nature." The other drawing was that of one of the passengers stepping back to give his place in the last lifeboat to a woman with a child. Underneath that picture was the caption: "The Supremacy of Man, the Weakness of Nature."

There are elements in man which transcend nature. Conscience, chivalry, the sense of honor—these are factors which physical science cannot explain or chart. The more we learn about our own natures, the more depths of mystery we discover to be plumbed. If we are to believe in ourselves, we must believe in the supernatural.

We shall speak of miracles in Chapter III.

**Why encourage men to have more faith when a basic trouble of our time is that we take too much on faith and are not realistic enough?**

To be sure, we often fool ourselves by believing too much, and many are making that mistake right now. But it is also true that we can fool ourselves by believing too little, and that is one of the besetting evils of our day. While there is need to guard against overconfidence, the even greater need is to beware of being oversuspicious.

The darkness, the dangers, and the disillusionment of the last decade have lowered our faith in our fellow men and in God. Now is the time to remember that realism is not synonymous with pessimism or suspicion. We do not see things realistically when we are always trying to "see through" them.

Faith has been defined as "reason grown courageous." And that is what we need—minds brave enough to look facts in the face and follow where they lead. Such an attitude is realistic and also religious.

**Is not religious faith pretty largely wishful thinking?**

Suppose we say that wishful thinking explains our hopes of heaven, then what accounts for the fear of hell? Many charge that religious faith springs largely from fear.

Undoubtedly some religious beliefs are fathered by men's wishes and some are spawned by their fears. But the roots of religion run far more deeply. It was something more than wishful thinking that sent Saint Francis out to be a brother to the lepers, and fired Savonarola with a passion for cleansing Florence, and called Dr. Grenfell from the plush offices of London's Harley Street to the bleak shores of Labrador. Wishful thinking may call for a God to die *with*, but the prophets heard the call of a God to die *for*.

The springs of religion are in such things as love and duty, honor and self-respect, the majesty as well as the mystery of life. We follow our faith because of values in the soul far more real than wishes in the mind.

**As scientific knowledge increases, will we not depend less on faith?**

More, not less! The question implies a misunderstanding of faith. It is not a mental prop to lean on in lieu of facts to stand on. Faith is the spur which sends us out to find the facts and keeps us going beyond the bounds of our maps. Hence faith and science grow together.

The search for truth is not only an endless but an expanding quest. Every invention and discovery inspire new inventors and explorers and the more men learn, the more conscious they become of the values and vastness which lie beyond their knowledge. After all his achievements in science, Isaac Newton said that he felt like a boy playing with the pebbles on the shore of truth.

The advances of science serve to clear away the cobwebs of superstition which darken the mind and thereby open human thought to vaster vistas of wonder. As we outgrow some mysteries we grow into greater. To the astronomer with his telescope even more than to the Psalmist with his naked eye do the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament show his handiwork. Science enlarges the area of faith and increases the role of religion.

### **How can religious faith help me when I am battling a bad temptation?**

New incentives and new emotions are needed when imaginations and passions are inflamed. And here is where religion comes to the aid of the will. It gives the added resources of good thoughts, inspiring examples and godly environment.

Dr. Thomas Chalmers of Scotland was riding one day behind the driver of a pony cart. At a certain point in the road the driver drew his whip and gave the pony a pretty sharp flick. When Dr. Chalmers remonstrated, the driver replied, "Do you see that white post? This pony has a way of shying at it, so when we approach it, I always give him a touch of the whip to let him have something else to think about!" The incident is said to have suggested to Dr. Chalmers the theme of one of the world's greatest sermons, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection," in which he pointed out how God gives us something better to think about when we approach temptation.

God turns on the light of love, which drives out the darkness of lust. He gives the feeling of victory to replace the despair of defeat. He links our spirits with a "Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness."

### **Why cannot religious differences, like scientific questions, be discussed calmly and without controversy?**

For one reason, religious views often seem life-and-death issues to their devotees. If one person thinks that another's beliefs about religion are undermining the road of salvation, he is bound to get more excited than he would over differences of opinion regarding cosmic rays or color television.

Yet, however deeply concerned we may be over the issues involved, religious discussions should be conducted in the spirit of conference rather than controversy. If we are seeking the truth, our point is to find out what is right rather than to prove ourselves right.

If a person has no interest in religion, what can be done about it?

Oliver Wendell Holmes in "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table" said that there are some persons who seem to have no bent for religion just as there are those who have no ear for music. He admitted that he was one who did not take naturally to religion but that he was turned to it by the discipline of the trials he had to endure.

Life itself has a way of doing something about our lack of interest in religion. For instance, the responsibilities involved in rearing children may cause a "return to religion" as in the case of the late well-known psychologist, Dr. Henry C. Link. A person may feel pretty adequate to handle his own life and then discover that he needs higher help in guiding the lives growing up beside him.

Or, as Maeterlinck reminded us, beauty and grandeur are all about us, but it often takes emergency or disaster to crack the shell of life and let the gleams of God break through. Is it wise to wait to be hit before we are awakened to what religious faith has to offer? Is it smart to go through life without looking into the force called religion which has inspired the world's finest art, its greatest music, its noblest living?

Perhaps the best way to stir a man out of his religious indifference is to expose him to the influences which suggest the "something more" which he is missing. Few if any persons are fully satisfied that they are getting out of life all that there is to get. When the rich young man in the gospel story looked at Jesus, he saw that the moneyless carpenter had something which his own wealth was not giving him.

A man, if he is wise, wants to be prepared to face the worst. He also wants to be ready to receive the best. Both considerations should arouse interest in religion.

## CHAPTER II

### *Belief in God*

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"I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth"

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#### HOW DO WE ENTER THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS?

Faith is blended with the baby's first food. The normal family lives and moves and has its being in a climate of mutual trust. And even though a home may have no visible and outward link with the church, it is indirectly the heir of religious influence through its community. The American family cannot be absolutely divorced from religious faith because in this country's traditional community life converge the currents of the church, the home, and the school. The belief in God is in the air we breathe at birth.

Perhaps my own personal pilgrimage will serve to show the steps by which a child's mind may emerge from the atmosphere of family faith into an awareness of God. In my home, religion was not frequently discussed but it was taken for granted. It was assumed that I would start to school when I reached the age of six and it was also assumed that at a still earlier age I would start to "Sunday school."

My childhood mind was not troubled by doubts of God's existence. I would have been much more comfortable at times had I not believed in Him. Hence when I hear cynical

critics say that belief in God is only wishful thinking, I know it was not so in my case for I believed in God even when I wished there were no such Being to see what I was doing. And that is a point to remember!

Nor should it be assumed on the other hand that my first concepts of God sprang from fear. In my home God was not often called in as a Divine Policeman to enforce rules when parental discipline failed.

Of course, I must admit that I took my belief in God pretty much on the authority of the persons closest to me. My parents, my friends, practically all the people I knew apparently believed in God. But if anyone would discredit my early religious beliefs because I took them on the authority of others, I could answer that in school during the week I accepted much of the information offered on the basis of authority also. I took my teacher's word for the belief that the earth is round. I could not see it for myself. I accepted the authority of a textbook for the statement that light travels 186,000 miles per second. I could not prove it. When my teacher told me that India's Taj Mahal is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, and that the pictures shown me could give no adequate idea of its loveliness by moonlight, I believed it on her authority. And how could she have proved to me its beauty anyhow? If all our ancestors had insisted on proving everything for themselves, they would still be cave men believing that the earth is flat.

The late Professor Eddington of Cambridge has discussed with delightful sarcasm the folly of trying to rationalize religious or secular propositions in advance of personal experience. He wrote: "I am standing on the threshold about to enter a room. It is a complicated business. In the first place I must shove against an atmosphere pressing with a force of fourteen pounds on every square inch of my body. I must make sure of landing on a plank traveling at twenty miles a second round the sun. I must do this while hanging from a

round planet, head outward into space, and with a wind of ether blowing at no one knows how many miles a second through every interstice of my body. The plank has no solidity of substance. To step on it is like stepping on a swarm of flies. Shall I not slip through? Verily it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a scientific man to pass through a door. And whether this door be a barn door or a church door, it would be wiser that he should consent to be an ordinary man and walk in rather than wait until all the difficulties involved in a scientific ingress are resolved."<sup>1</sup>

I suppose it must be said that I entered the field of religious faith feet first rather than head first.

#### HOW DO WE START EXPLORING FOR OURSELVES?

Like other youths, I began to wonder about what was behind and within and beyond the things I saw and heard.

Gradually I discovered that there is insight as well as sight. For instance, I would commit to memory passages of poetry and quotations from great men, and then, perhaps months later, a new and deeper meaning would suddenly flash out of the words and I had an insight into the writer's mind.

While my increasing information caused me to outgrow some of my childhood wonders, I found myself growing into greater wonders. For instance, I entered into a deeper and richer understanding of Santa Claus, that mysterious power of love which comes down the chimneys of houses where families live together in mutual helpfulness and makes hearts merry with glad surprises. Thus myth merged into truth often better than fiction.

I learned, too, that there is a way of knowing some things by intuition. I seemed to "divine" how my mother would

<sup>1</sup>A. S. Eddington, *Nature of the Physical World* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 342.



look at certain things. I discovered that in family circles thought often leaps through language and escapes, and friends share feelings too deep for words. I could frequently tell by intuition what Father was thinking, and he had an uncanny way of knowing what I had been doing or planning to do! Thoughts could flash around our family table even while we sat in utter silence.

And although I was far from being aesthetic in my tastes, I had some intuitive appreciation of beauty. When as a boy of ten I was taken to Niagara Falls, I could hardly say with Wordsworth that I felt "a Presence that disturbed me with the joy of elevated thoughts." Nevertheless, I was stirred with an indefinable feeling which I suppose could be called awe or reverence.

Also, I had intuitions of goodness and duty. Before I learned the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments by heart, there was something that told me it was right to be kind and helpful and wrong to hurt and cheat. And as I grew a little older, something inside me answered to the Bible stories which I had heard and read earlier. Moses was no longer merely a baby who had been rescued from a basket in a river to become the leader of a grand march through the wilderness. I began to see that Moses was great and memorable because he had followed the highest he knew with the best he had, and that when I and others do likewise we too partake of greatness.

The goodness that I beheld in noble characters, and especially in Jesus, begot a response inside me. It was more than an impression registered on my plastic mind. It was more like a melody that set something singing in the back of my mind.

Years later these experiences were recalled with a new clarity when I read Professor Rudolf Otto's treatise on the roots of religious feeling. He drew a suggestive analogy to this nonrational element from the realm of music: "In the

state of mind induced in us by a song set to music there are feelings aroused by the verbal text, such as homesickness, or joy, or confidence in time of danger, or hope for future good, all of which are concrete elements capable of being described in conceptual terms. But it is otherwise with the music, purely as music. It releases a blissful rejoicing in us, and we are conscious of a glimmering, billowy agitation occupying our minds, without being able to explain in concepts what it really is that moves us so deeply.”<sup>2</sup>

The effect of this description is heightened when we hear William James, himself not a mystic, trying to express in a similar figure his religious experience. He admitted that his belief in God rested on the logic of his own sense of need. But James also confessed to a feeling which outran logic. “It is,” he said, “very vague and impossible to describe or put into words. In this it is somewhat like another experience that I have constantly, a tune that is always singing in the back of my mind but which I can never identify or whistle or get rid of. Something like that is my feeling for God, or a beyond. Especially at times of moral crises it comes to me, as the sense of an unknown something backing me up. It is most indefinite, to be sure, and rather faint. And yet I know that if it should cease, there would be a great hush, a great void in my life.”<sup>3</sup>

Our minds are not mere photographic plates on which sense impressions are recorded and then arranged by reason into logical concepts. They are to some extent at least like musical instruments played on both by external and internal stimuli. Something inside us responds and vibrates to certain chords from beyond us.

Thus religious faith, caught through feelings and ideas from early associations and taken for granted on the author-

<sup>2</sup>Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by James Bissett Pratt in the *Hibbert Journal*, October 1911, p. 232.

ity of parents and teachers, is reinforced and expanded by intuition, insight, and experience. Religion did not have its origin in the rationalizing faculty. Reason has not been the initiator of life's great movements. It has come in to correct and direct them, but it has not furnished the creative impulse. The appropriation of mystery does not need to wait upon the analysis of it any more than the perfume of the flower must await the mastery of botany. Religion, like love or loyalty, springs from a "hidden predisposition of the spirit."<sup>4</sup>

#### WHAT KEEPS THE SEEKERS SEARCHING?

Having followed the steps of one fairly normal individual through his childhood faith, let us now lift our eyes to the long line of pilgrims in their search for God. Instead of looking for God, look for a moment at the lookers.

Wherever we behold man, he is groping for his gods. What keeps him ever seeking? Some could answer that he is lured on by his own wishful thinking. In his thirst for something better than he has, man follows a mirage which promises to furnish satisfaction for his craving. But as we have said above, wishes may cause man to dream pictures of heaven but they do not account for his fear of hell. Nor do they explain missionaries and martyrs. A mirage may keep a desert traveler going until he falls in his tracks, but something more than a mirage has sustained explorers and engineers to map and irrigate the deserts. So in religion, the pilgrimage of seekers has not been perpetuated through the ages by mere false reflections in the sky of man's imagination.

Many, on the other hand, look back at primitive man and say that the savage sought his gods because he was afraid. Caught by storms which he could not control, deafened by

<sup>4</sup>Otto, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

thunder which crashed down upon him mysteriously out of the heavens, mystified by disaster and dreams and death, primitive man turned in terror to make terms with the Higher Powers. But does this motive of fear explain the festivals of the harvest and the ritual dances at weddings?

Granted that prayer is often motivated by fear and self-interest, these motives do not account for the following ancient petition: "Teach us, O Lord, not to seek so much to be consoled as to console; not so much to be understood as to understand; not so much to be loved as to love." When the Pilgrim Fathers knelt on the shores of Holland before sailing for America, it might plausibly be claimed that they were moved by fear of the voyage which lay before them, but does fear explain why they declared a Day of Thanksgiving after the rigors of the voyage and the wilderness?

If the search for God derives from mere superstition, then education and culture would tend to stop it. But the fact is that churches and schools have grown together. Religious faith has inspired the founding of colleges; in turn, the spread of higher learning has reacted to refine and enrich the churches. The membership of America's churches has grown faster than her population.

When we try to sum up the motives which send men in search of God, about the best we can do is to say that it is their sense of inadequacy. Man does not feel himself adequate to confront the world without higher help. Also, he does not feel the world in its earthly aspects is adequate for his highest development. On the one hand, the world seems too big for him; on the other hand, he seems too big for the world. This sense of insufficiency persists in the thoughtful man of the twentieth century as it did in the primitive savage. In fact it grows upon us with the progress of our civilization.

One of the paradoxes of our time is that we have more power at our disposal than ever before, and yet we seem

more powerless than ever. We have ever more mechanical slaves and governmental servants working for us, and yet we feel ourselves at the mercy of machines and governments. Hence the search grows more insistent for a power higher than ourselves to help us face the world in which we live. And as we learn more about our inner potentialities, we yearn more poignantly for a life large enough for our souls. In our search for God we are led by the lure of mystery and the longing for mastery.

In the physical order we explain the instincts and aptitudes of creatures by saying that they are in response to environment. For example, the skin of the animal grows fur in conformity to the climate wherein it dwells. The sensitivity of the eye develops in response to the light surrounding it. Now, if it is correct to assume that our physical appetites and aptitudes are called forth in response to environment, is it not also reasonable to say that this persistent universal search for God is man's response to the divine presence? To repeat the words of Pascal, "Thou wouldst not seek me if thou hadst not already found me." Thus one evidence of God is the hunger which sets men searching for him—a hunger which persists from the primitive savage to the modern sage.

#### WHAT IS BACK OF BEAUTY?

In the dark days of 1914 on the eve of World War I, Viscount Grey, Britain's Foreign Minister, spent an evening at a friend's home listening to a program of Handel's music. Afterward he wrote in a personal letter: "Europe is in the most terrifying trouble it has ever known in civilized times; and no one can say what will be left at the end. But Handel's music will survive."

And beauty does survive the brutality of wars. When Napoleon was bombarding Vienna, Beethoven lived in the

besieged city. During the stress of those days, Beethoven composed his opera *Fidelio*. Napoleon's guns are silenced, but *Fidelio* is still being staged. The bombs of war have no respect for the works of art, but people have turned from the bombings to pursue the arts with increased zest. America is witnessing more popular interest in music and painting than ever before.

Whence comes the love of beauty and harmony which bitterness and butchery cannot quench? What keeps poets singing like birds in the gathering storm? Who puts the longing for loveliness in our natures if there be no inspirer of beauty at the heart of the universe? Beauty is an ultimate value which calls for a Divine Creator of values.

#### WHY DOES SCIENCE SEARCH FOR TRUTH?

Much is said about the conflict between science and religion. Why not consider their kinship? Think of the devoted scientists who keep sane while men go mad with hate and hysteria. Recall the servants of science who pursue their ideal of truth not deflected by dictators or mobs. Consider the men of the laboratories who go quietly on preparing the means of longer and healthier living while governments pile up the instruments of death. What goads them to their goals?

To be sure, science has been prostituted to the lusts of war. In part its progress can be explained by greed and self-interest. Science cannot be trusted to save us for it does not carry within itself the power to control itself. We cannot, therefore, make a god of science.

But when we keep clear the respective roles of science and religion, we see them as allies rather than enemies. "The purpose of science is to develop without prejudice or preconception of any kind a knowledge of the facts, the laws and the processes of nature. The even more important task

of religion, on the other hand, is to develop the consciences, the ideals and the aspirations of mankind."<sup>5</sup> Hence, while science and religion work with different media, they must be teamed together. The ideals of life cannot be effectively furthered without an accurate knowledge of the laws of nature, and the aspirations of men wither prematurely without a rootage in facts. Conversely, without the control of conscience and the restraints of divine direction, science can undo the fabric of civilization with its force and potential destructiveness.

The deeper fact, however, is not that science and religion must be harnessed together but that they are linked like siamese twins. The spirit of truth is the lifeblood which flows through both. And whence comes that spirit of truth if not from a divine source at the heart of the universe? There must be a Creator who cares for truth since there are human creatures who live and die for it.

#### HOW ACCOUNT FOR GOODNESS?

Men are ever discussing the problem of evil. If there be a God, all-good and all-powerful, why does he allow so many bad things to happen? That is a real question. But the mystery of evil in a world ruled by God is not so baffling as the mystery of goodness in a godless world. We can understand how a fatherly God must give man certain freedom in order to develop his character and how man may misuse his liberty in the excesses of evil, but if there be no God, what makes a man sacrifice for a noble cause or pray for his crucifiers?

We can explain evil as the absence or perversion of good as we explain darkness as the absence of light, but we find it as difficult to account for goodness without a good-giving

<sup>5</sup>Robert A. Millikan, *Science and Life* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1924), p. 51.

God as we find it hard to account for light without a light-radiating sun. Goodness and light are positive; evil and darkness are negative. A bad man may be understood as a good man gone wrong, but a good man is somewhat more than an evil person in reverse. Hate may be explained as love turned sour, but love is more than sweetened bitterness. A hurricane is an orderly wind gone berserk, but a rainbow is not an artificially painted cloud. Baffling indeed is the mystery of life's negative forces which turn good into evil, but the deeper problem is to explain who provides the positive forces of good.

And goodness is not only the positive but also the predominant force. The bad deeds of men are still so rare that they make the news columns. The ruthless forces of evil turn the good earth into bloody battlefields, but law and order are still the general rule. The plotters of evil are outnumbered by the planners of good. Good Samaritanism is still to be found amid the roughest drivers of our crowded highways, and the milk of human kindness has not disappeared from the doorsteps of our congested cities.

Since water does not rise higher than its source, we believe that the human manifestations of goodness are to be explained only by a Divine Creator in whom are the springs of goodness.

#### WHOSE IS THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE?

The moral skeptics say that the voice of conscience is but "the echo of earlier tunes" played by our predecessors and the reflection of the social approvals uttered by our contemporary communities. As proof they cite the fact that the same act may be called right in Russia and wrong in America, approved in Manhattan and forbidden in the Bible Belt. Under such interpretations, the following of conscience becomes merely a surrender to secondhand judg-



ments and a form of prudence, an adjustment to one's environment.

Investigation, however, weakens this theory. Conscience often runs counter to public opinion and tradition. William Carey was not echoing the voices of his city or of his church when he left England on what was called a foolhardy mission to convert India. Conscience shows individual inventiveness, lighting upon new types of action as keenly as upon old. It revises ancient respectabilities and rebels against established conventions. Conscience is the censor before which desires, instinctive tendencies, and acts of the will are brought. It is the instrument for the self-integration of life's impulsive elements. It is a possession belonging to original human nature. The sense of "ought" is an experience as unique as the experience of sound or color.

And how did this judgment-forming conscience come to be in us? If the human creature has this inborn sense of right and wrong, there must be a moral sense in his Divine Creator.

#### WHO IS THE MAKER OF AN EARTH LIKE OURS?

A bird's-eye view of the world reveals men and nations going around in the vicious circles of fear and hatred. But behold the birds who do the viewing. They are themselves being guided through the trackless air on their unerring migrations. And when we complain about the mysterious disorders which "turn the world upside down," let us also be mindful of the mysterious force of gravitation which keeps our world right side up.

When we grow gloomy over the infidelities of men, we can turn to nature and strengthen our faith in her fidelity. The seasons return with unfailing regularity. The good earth brings forth her increase, and the stars keep their courses. We take the microscope and behold below the line of human

vision a realm as perfectly articulated as the heavens above. When we consider the unity, the order, and the adaptiveness of the physical universe, we are disposed to say with the Psalmist: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, we can no longer say, as in the days of Paley, that the only alternative to a divine design is the absurd notion that the marvelous mechanisms of nature are the result of pure chance. Since Darwin proved that species are not immutable, the "design" argument has lost some of its force. The orderly linkage of natural phenomena can be seen to be very largely the product of a long process of "variation and selection."

But whatever we may think of the process of selection, we can hardly say that the direction of variation can be wholly due to chance or purblind groping. From the hulking dinosaur ambling in the swamps to the deft little man draining those marshes to kill the germs and raise the crops, from the mud of the cave to the majesty of the Parthenon, from the growl of the wolves in the pack to a great congregation singing the "Hallelujah Chorus"—these are gradations upward which indicate direction and purposive design.

Admittedly, the Designer revealed in nature does not always appear to be good. Wild beasts live by the law of the jungle. Wily spiders weave their webs to catch unwary victims. Weeds choke out the flowers. Hurricanes hurl destruction across fertile fields and earthquakes shake houses down on sleeping children. If it is too harsh to say that "nature is red in tooth and claw," at least we must say that "the God of nature has no arms."

Nevertheless, though it is hard to see the goodness of nature in many of her aspects, there is a grace of nature which is hard to explain away. She grants extras which do not seem strictly required by the iron necessities of natural law. Think

<sup>8</sup>Psalm 19:1.

of sunsets, for example. We can calculate the exact moment of the sun's setting tomorrow night or a year from tonight. But who can predict the colors of those sunsets? This evening the western horizon may be adorned in gorgeous red; tomorrow night the garment may be a purple robe flecked with gold. All that man's physical health would have required is the alternation of light and darkness. Yet the Creator throws in the sunset colors as extras. It is as if the Creator, in wrapping up another day, ties it with a gay ribbon, as we do with our Christmas packages, to betoken love and joy.

Or consider the soil. There is a law-abiding fidelity in the earth which leads us to expect that "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Yet over and above the corn which produces corn and the wheat which produces wheat, nature throws in flowers. These are not needed for food. These are extra gifts.

In the light of nature's extras and gratuities, we can begin to understand why Sir James Jeans, the astronomer and physicist, asserted that phases of our physical world parallel music even more than mathematics. There are lovely overtones and melodious flourishes in nature. There is grace as well as law.

Sidney Lanier at a time of low ebb in his personal fortunes threw himself on the ground in despair, and there he spied a violet pushing its slender stem bravely upward through the matted grass. That little violet became the ladder of faith by which Lanier climbed back to confidence in God. Poetic insight is ever professing to see God in nature. And even the prosaic mind, when it ponders the order and adaptiveness of nature, finds convincing evidence of a Designer who is "Maker of heaven and earth."

In our search for the consistency of the Creator, we must discard our little finite measuring rods. One trouble with us is that we try to picture what we would do if we were

in God's place, and by that pattern we appraise the justice and reasonableness of God. In this we are like Job's tedious friends who tried to trace their neat explanations of sickness, accident, and tragedy. Out of the whirlwind came the rebuking voice: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding."<sup>7</sup>

Belief in God as "Maker of heaven and earth" does not banish all mystery. We do not know how God created the universe or when he did it. For all we know, the process of creation may still be going on. Perhaps God is spinning out new stars in the Milky Way at this moment. Those are questions for science, not theology. But we join with Einstein when he speaks of the scientist's "profound reverence for the rationality made manifest in existence."<sup>8</sup> And we cannot improve upon Genesis' opening statement, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We believe that God is the ultimate source of everything else.

CAN THE CREATOR OF THIS CRUEL WORLD BE  
THE "FATHER ALMIGHTY"?

Granting God's infinite wisdom, we still are puzzled by many iniquities. Admitting that God's knowledge exceeds ours and that there are two sides to every question, nevertheless there are some situations which seem bad on all sides. How, for instance, can an all-loving God allow wars which involve about all the evils Christ died to save men from? Why does the Heavenly Father, who sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust, allow some of his unjust sons to gobble up vast hoards of the earth's harvests while others

<sup>7</sup>Job 38:2,4.

<sup>8</sup>Albert Einstein, "Science and Religion," address at Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion held at Columbia University on September 9, 10, 11, 1940.

only half subsist? Why do the wicked so often prosper? Why do the innocent so frequently have to help pay the penalty of the guilty?

Various answers have been given to these vexing questions. The ancient Persians had an explanation that this world is a battleground between the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness. This concept of Persian Zoroastrianism was reflected in our Hebrew-Christian traditional thought. Our religious forebears tried to find an explanation for the iniquities of life in the struggle between God and the Devil, or Satan. But the belief in the Devil as God's personal adversary raises some perplexing questions. If we think of the Devil as coequal with God, then we have two absolutes, an idea which is philosophically inconsistent. Or if we think of the Devil as Milton pictured him, in the form of a fallen angel, the question then arises as to why an all-powerful God permitted such an event to happen. Hence the belief in a Devil as an adversary playing havoc with God's plans is not a very satisfactory answer to the mystery of iniquity.

During the First World War, H. G. Wells evolved another answer to the mystery of iniquity. In his book, *God, the Invisible King*, he pictured Christ as a noble fighter for love and goodness, and to him we should be heartily loyal. But this Christ is working in a world managed, mismanaged, or blindly directed by a veiled Being, God; and the injustices of life are due to the indifference of God to the gallant struggle of the good Christ. This interpretation by Mr. Wells cannot satisfy us of the Christian faith, for the Christ we follow declared, "I and the Father are one."<sup>9</sup> We believe that we behold the glory and character of God in the personality of Jesus Christ.

No, we cannot account for iniquity by saying that it is a struggle between God and Satan or between Christ and

<sup>9</sup>John 10:30.

God. We believe in one Absolute and Holy God, the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And it is in the very Fatherhood of God that we must and do find our general explanation of evil. God rules as a father heads a family and not as a dictator rules a dominion. God is limited by the laws of fatherhood. There are some things a father cannot do. God, like any good father, cannot regiment his children, for enforced regimentation makes slave minds and not free characters. God, like any good father, cannot lead his children away from evil as a householder keeps her dog away from the dangers of traffic, for God is raising sons, not dogs. God, like any good father, breaks his heart when his children go wrong, but he cannot break the rules of fatherhood by chaining them up to keep them from going wrong. If God interfered with man's right of free choice, he would cease to be a father and become a dictator. Why then does God allow war and man's inhumanity to man? Because, as our Heavenly Father, he has to leave us free.

One thing then we can say about the mystery of iniquity—it is due to the rebellion of free men against their Heavenly Father. And in this the innocent sometimes suffer with the guilty because no man liveth or sinneth to himself. A friend of mine who has a model poultry farm told me recently that he keeps his hens in individual coops so that he can check up on each one to see whether she is a profitable servant in producing eggs. That may be a pretty efficient way to spot the slackers in a poultry yard, but God cannot keep his children cooped up in individual pens. We are not livestock in a barnyard; we are the sons of God dwelling together in the great family of God. We travel the highways of life with fellow men, and on the road the recklessness of some drivers raises the insurance rates for others. When we sin, others are "wounded for our transgressions [and] bruised for our iniquities."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Isaiah 53:5.

Another thing we can say about the mystery of iniquity is what the Psalmist said: "Fret not yourself because of the wicked, be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither as the green herb."<sup>11</sup> If we could see farther into the final results of things, we would see that the prosperity of the wicked is more fiction than fact. Wealth, evilly earned, does not yield dividends of lasting satisfaction. Power, unjustly seized, has not proven permanent. The Babylons have fallen. The Herods have been hounded with bad dreams, and their memories have lived only to be hated. Give it time, and iniquity unravels much of its own mystery.

And still another thing we can say about the mystery of iniquity is this, that in the overcoming of evil there is great reward. George Eliot in her *Romola* traces the patient struggle of the heroine against the perfidy of her false husband. And then in the epilogue, she speaks of the happiness that belongs to evil endured and overcome. She says: "It often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before everything else, because our souls see it is good." Yes, there is a satisfaction which is wrung from the struggle with evil. It has scars on it. It has pain in it. But when we feel it in our souls we know that it is good.

The mystery of iniquity does reveal meaning after all. It may render a service somewhat like that of the head wind in flying. The head wind slows the rate of our plane, but we could not rise from the ground without it. Evil can become the medium against which we rise to our higher selves.

God, the "Maker of heaven and earth," is not an uninhibited and irresponsible despot. He is the "Father Almighty," able to do anything fitting to a father, limited by his love, controlled by his character, devoted to the development of his children.

<sup>11</sup>Psalm 37: 1-2.

WHAT FURTHER ROADS TO THE ASSURANCE  
OF GOD?

When we say, "I believe *in* God the Father Almighty," we mean more than mere intellectual belief in his existence. We mean that we believe in him enough to trust him, to rely on him, to obey him.

How do we advance from belief *about* God to belief *in* him? Well, how do we make another human being a factor in our lives? I may be told that there is a man in San Francisco who feels friendly toward me. My reason may convince me that the reports are true. But if I am to become sure of his friendship as a vital reality, I must do something about it. Similarly in our relationship with God, action must be added to thinking if religious certainty is to be attained. To those who questioned his authority, Jesus said: ". . . if any man's will is to do his [God's] will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority."<sup>12</sup> When we give the best we have to the highest we know, we find more and more light breaking on our minds. When we do the duty next to us and then the duty next to that, we get guidance toward the ultimate goals.

We find God becoming more real to us when we do something difficult for the sake of conscience. A friend tells that he once staked his future on a fateful moral decision. Having risked so much for what he thought was right, he at first felt frighteningly let down, as if he were sinking in quicksand. But eventually he touched something firm and he became sure that "underneath were the everlasting arms." Others of us can testify that when we have clung to duty until we thought we had reached the end of our strength, we have discovered One "who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all

<sup>12</sup>John 7:17.



that we ask or think."<sup>13</sup> We have inner resources whose values we do not know until we tax them. We come through some long and trying experience saying: "If I had known in advance what I had to endure, I could not have stood it"; but in the ordeal we discovered the truth that "as your days, so shall your strength be."<sup>14</sup> Humbled and grateful, we are aware that the source of that strength is a "Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness."

And this reinforcement becomes most clear to us when we summon it for needs beyond our own. Prayer is most real to us when we are asking God for resources to help others. Faith is stronger in those who have done the most for God and others than in those for whom God and others have done the most.

Sometimes in the struggle with doubt the road to victory is by way of surrender. When Alcoholics Anonymous sets out to restore a victim, the first step is for the man to admit that he cannot handle his habit by his own strength. When the inexperienced swimmer is tossed into the water, he tries to support himself by his own frantic efforts. He beats furiously with his hands and feet as if everything depended on his own energy. But watch the graceful trained swimmer and note how he blends the movements of his body with the buoyancy of the water. So when we are out in the deep waters of life, we must learn to supplement our efforts with that divine support which the Psalmist felt when he said, "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him."<sup>15</sup>

The assurance of God's support comes also by continuous and commonplace cultivation in "practicing his presence." Noble symphonies do not take untutored minds by storm. They require time and much living with. They win their devotees slowly by their beauty and grandeur. The following of conscience may be trying at first but finally that which was an effort becomes a joy. In the service of God the first

<sup>13</sup>Ephesians 3:20.<sup>14</sup>Deuteronomy 33:25.<sup>15</sup>Psalm 37:7.

stages may seem burdensome duty, but perseverance transforms the load into a lift. We reach a point where we who have been seeking to get hold of God feel God getting hold of us.

And if we are to "practice God's presence," we must advance from the stage of talking *about* him to the attitude of talking *to* him. Suppose two of us are discussing a third person, Jones. We talk about his character, his prospects, perhaps his peculiarities. Then suppose he suddenly walks into the room. What happens? We simply cannot go on talking about him, no matter whether we are saying nice things or bad things. Why not? It just does not seem decent to talk about a person when he is present. And why is it not decent? Because even though we may be talking about him as a person, we are treating him as an impersonal object.

When a person is present, he has a right to be spoken *to* and not merely spoken *about*. Speech to a person presupposes that he is a rational being, with a self-directing and responsible will, who can engage in an answering activity. The relationship between two living persons is an "I—thou" relationship not an "I—it" relationship. When another person is treated as a subject and not as an object, we can apprehend him as personal.

Now apply this principle to God. We can talk about Jones if he is not present, but God is always present. He does not come into a room; he is there already. He is the eternal and ever-present Thou. Hence our attitude should not be to talk *about* God as if he were an impersonal object. We should talk *to* him. Even when we speak of him in the third person as I am doing now, we should try to do so with a consciousness that he is included in the conversation.<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter we have traced the road to assurance of God from its beginning in the beliefs of childhood through

<sup>16</sup>H. H. Farmer, *Towards Belief in God* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 33.

the expanding insights of youth and the confirming reasons of maturity. But to follow the road requires obedience to the best light of conscience, a will surrendered to the highest service, and a continuing practice of God's presence. This is the road which the saints have trodden, and their mounting testimony through the centuries is that thereon they have found the living God.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

**How can God look after individuals in a universe as vast as ours?**

Only God knows. But this we do know: love has a way of individualizing, irrespective of numbers. Though there may be ten children in a family, the parents know the peculiar qualities of each. If a child die, the father does not dismiss the matter lightly because he has lost only one tenth of his brood. In the home each member is a person, not a percentage. And if earthly fathers thus individualize their children, who can set limits to the infinite love of the Heavenly Father?

Also, we know that every one of us has a configuration of finger tip so uniquely his own that the F.B.I. or Scotland Yard can identify us though we hide in the slums of Singapore. The God who can create enough individual patterns of fingers to go around might be credited with the ability to keep track of all his children.

**How can we be sure that God is guiding us?**

First, pray as Jesus did in Gethsemane, “. . . not my will, but thine, be done.”<sup>17</sup> And make sure you mean it.

<sup>17</sup>Luke 22:42.

Second, cleanse your mind and conscience, for it is the pure in heart who see God.<sup>18</sup>

Third, use your own best judgment. The prophet Hosea interprets God as saying of Israel: "I led them with cords of compassion."<sup>19</sup> What are these compassions of a man? They are intelligence, reason, insight, intuition. God's guidance is not a substitute for our own best thought but a supplement to it.

And then if you are still not clear as to what God would have you do, consider the method privately described by a devout and educated woman. She says that sometimes trying to find God's will is like standing beside a stream which is so placid and still that the eye at first cannot tell which way it is flowing. But if you throw a twig into the water and watch it for a few moments, you can detect the drift. So when she is in doubt as to the direction God would have her take, she makes some venture of faith, and that venture, like the floating twig, reveals the drift of the divine will.

And it might be added that when we are in doubt as to which of two courses is the right one to take, the harder is more likely to be God's way for us.

**I am a fatalist. I believe that what is going to happen will happen and when my number is up, it will get me. What is the use of praying in a world where everything is determined by fate?**

During the last war a sailor said to me, "When the bullet or the bomb comes along with my number on it, it will get me, so why worry, for what can I do about it?" I answered: "Suppose that you went out on the deck of your blacked-out ship and lighted a cigarette, and suppose the flicker of the match gave the signal to a lurking submarine, which thereupon torpedoed your ship. Would it be quite true to say that the torpedo was sent by fate and that you had nothing to do with it?" The sailor admitted that his action would have to bear part of the responsibility.

<sup>18</sup>Matthew 5:8.

<sup>19</sup>Hosea 11:4.

The question of free will has perplexed man down the ages, and becomes more acute when the individual is caught as now in titanic forces beyond his control. Unquestionably environment and heredity do encircle each individual, and within the circle man's lot is cast. But no one fills the circle to the full. Everyone has abundant room within the circle fixed for him to determine the area which he will actually occupy. Free men can make personal decisions that determine human destiny. Whatever the forces that play upon him, there is some point at which a person is morally responsible for his choices.

"The modern psychologist and biologist are not discovering that man is an automaton; instead they are learning how to define the limits within which he is the master of his fate, the captain of his soul."<sup>20</sup>

**If God is omnipotent, can he not do anything he pleases? —**

Not in the sense that we commonly use the expression, "do as we please." God has set limits to what he can do in order to make this a law-abiding universe. God has to ordain laws by which he himself is governed if his own children are to comprehend him and live under his rule.

It would be intolerable to live in a world ruled by a dictator whose deeds and whims were utterly arbitrary and unpredictable. In fact it would be impossible.

**Does history reveal the evidence of God's rule?**

Yes, we can see the hand of God in the recorded course of human events, but we must beware lest we try to make history prove too much. Our finite minds should not presume to pick out too definitely the links of cause and effect in history's chain.

The life of man on this planet is not "a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing." It is a drama with a plot sufficiently traceable to reveal the direction of a Divine Producer. Although there has been retrogression as

<sup>20</sup>Kirtley Mather, *Enough and to Spare* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), p. 128.

well as progress, it shows moral and mental development. Harsh and brutal systems have not held their gains. Though lies travel with thousand-league boots, truth ultimately overtakes falsehood. Ideals wither in seasons of cynicism but their roots remain. And in the long run the spiritually fittest survive.

When the late Charles A. Beard came to the close of his brilliant career at Columbia, he was asked what lessons he had learned from his lifelong study and teaching of history. He struck off these points: 1. The mills of the gods grind slowly but they grind exceedingly fine. 2. Those whom the gods are about to destroy, they first make mad. 3. When it gets dark enough, you can see the stars. 4. The bee fertilizes the flower that it robs.<sup>21</sup>

Here are at least four evidences of a sovereign purpose and justice at the heart of the universe.

### **If God is everywhere, why do we need altars and special places of worship?**

God is everywhere, but he has special ways and places by which he best catches our attention and awakens our devotion. While all nature may be called the garment of God, a golden sunset makes us more aware of his presence than does a dusty road.

God is a Person, and personality is more appealingly revealed in some acts than in others. The altar and the cross suggest the sacrificial love of God and kindle a response in our hearts.

We human beings need symbols to keep our sentiments vital. Flags have a useful function in preserving patriotism and wedding rings have a value in maintaining marriage vows. We are not always at our best. Insight comes and goes. Visions fade, and vows made in our highest moments need outward symbols of invisible grace to sustain them in our lower moods.

If religious feeling is to be kept fresh, there must be a ritual of affection between man and God as between man and wife. A husband and wife may be loyal to each other and mean well.

<sup>21</sup>Personal letter to the author, dated May 12, 1941.

But if there are never any words of endearment, never any tender glances of affection, never any observing of anniversaries to stir memories, marriage loses its radiance. Likewise between man and his Maker, love needs its symbols, its trysting places, its special times of cultivation.

If God is an all-wise Creator who designs everything for a purpose, why is there so much waste in the world?

The operations of nature do often seem wasteful to us. But if we are to appraise the wastefulness of nature's processes, we must rise above our little scales of measurement and catch something of the bigness with which God runs the business of the universe. This was the lesson which Job had to learn. Our finite minds cannot figure profits and losses in the ledger of infinity.

Furthermore, before we call creation wasteful, we must think in terms of future fertility rather than quick utility. Jesus suggested this distinction in his remarks after a grateful woman had anointed his head and feet with precious perfume. The disciples complained, saying, "Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for a large sum, and given to the poor."<sup>22</sup> But Jesus silenced their criticism, exclaiming, ". . . wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."<sup>23</sup> It was as if Jesus were contrasting the immediate utility of spending the money on the poor with the future fertilizing effect of the woman's uncalculating generosity as it would be told down the centuries. Some things which seem waste at the time enrich the soil of future production.

God's processes must be appraised in the light of this principle. A grain of wheat falling into the ground appears to decay, but it is a death which gives birth to much fruit. The righteous man may not receive the prizes of the moment, but his very losses develop a richness in his life as it ripens toward maturity.

In the vastness of God's universe when we say a thing has

<sup>22</sup>Matthew 26:8,9.

<sup>23</sup>Matthew 26:13.

gone to waste, maybe it has merely passed beyond our range of measurement. The flame of the candle goes out, but we are told that its light goes on in interstellar space.

**When life is so full of evil how can the Bible say, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God"?**

This is an assertion of faith which, I am frank to confess, has sometimes seemed too high and sweeping for me. Things have happened to me which I find hard to view as working for good. But the longer I live and ponder these words, the more I come to think of them after the analogy of a ship. There are many parts of a ship which, taken singly, would sink. For example, the engine, the rudder, the steel frame. But when these heavy parts are built together into a ship, the whole structure floats.

So in life, many things which happen to us are not good in themselves. They are such heavy misfortunes that, occurring alone, they would sink us. But if we can keep the spirit of love and trust toward God through all that comes, we can take these tribulations, even our worst troubles, and build them together into a character and a philosophy of life which keep us afloat through all the storms.

And in all this I am helped by the examples of those who have endured the most. It is a fact of history that the persons who have suffered the most and who might therefore seem to have most reason for doubting the goodness of God are the ones who have the firmest faith in him.

Perhaps we should read Paul's statement in the Revised Standard Version before we try to explain it: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him."<sup>24</sup>

**My son was killed in World War II. Am I to believe that his death was God's will?**

No. Let us be done with the pious profanity which reads the will of God into man's own willfulness. When nations

<sup>24</sup>Romans 8:28.



drift along with stupid, selfish, and dishonest diplomacy until they get into a war, we have no right to say God caused it. Such calamities are not God's will but God's agony. Or when we neglect our health and dissipate our energies until we invite disease, we should not say, "It is God's will." Or when we allow children to live in unwholesome conditions until one of them dies, we must not stand over the coffin of the underprivileged child and say, "God took him."

Since God is a Father, he has to give man certain freedom of choice in order to develop character. When men misuse their freedom and bring on tragedy, God suffers as an earthly father suffers in the disasters of his children. Yes, as a good parent he suffers more than his children.

In the loss of your heroic son you can have the comforting assurance that life sacrificially given is not lost. Such a spirit is too great for the grave.

**If this is a law-abiding universe, how are we to explain the element of chance?**

It is not to be denied that the element of chance is a very real factor in life. Things do happen without apparent reason. Careers sometimes seem to turn on the most casual and unpredictable occurrences. ". . . time and chance happen to them all."<sup>25</sup>

But think what life would be if all the element of chance were removed. If everything were "all cut and dried," life would be deadly dry. How could there be faith and hope if nothing unforeseen could happen? Where would be the romance of love if there were no adventure and no uncertainties?

God has confronted us with the factor of chance in order to make life stimulating and developing. There is a difference, however, between allowing for chance and relying on it. The good farmer allows for chance and thereby develops patience and resourcefulness; the gambler counts on chance and thereby weakens his character.

According to my dictionary, chance is "the unknown or un-

<sup>25</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:11.

defined cause of events that to us are uncertain or not subject to calculation." But man is ever learning the causes of events which formerly were regarded as mysterious and incalculable. Many things which our grandfathers called chance are now understood by us, and we shall go on bringing such areas into our charts of knowledge.

## *Belief in Jesus Christ*

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"I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord"

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### WHAT IS OUR FIRST RESPONSE TO JESUS?

During World War II a transport was torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic. Among the troops on board were four chaplains, one Jewish, one Roman Catholic, and two Protestant. These religious leaders helped the soldiers into the lifeboats, gave their own life belts to those who had none; and then, standing together on deck, clasping each other's hands in prayer, they went down with the ship.

What is the instant and spontaneous response of our spirits to a deed like that? It is more than mere admiration. We admire the brilliant leadership of a general or the masterful technique of a musician, but here is human conduct which sends a tingle from the top of our minds to the bottom of our hearts.

There are some things so altogether right that the wholeness of our nature responds to them spontaneously. We may be selfish, but a spirit within us answers to the call of noble selflessness. We may be cowardly, but there is a chord in us which vibrates to the note of valor.

When the story of Jesus strikes the mind of man with fresh impact, it stirs a feeling too deep to analyze. Some years ago a silent film was made of the dramatic scenes of

Jesus' life, under the title the *King of Kings*. It is not a perfect portrayal, but it is still being shown to uncounted thousands each year, especially during Holy Week. Sit in the crowded theater and watch the tense attitude of the spectators. Listen to their comments as they come out. Many leave almost in a daze.

The story of Jesus makes similar appeal to all races and religions. He captures the affection of the African native, the Russian peasant, the Hindu. This spontaneous and universal response to Jesus was voiced by Richard Watson Gilder in lines which he called, *The Song of the Heathen*:

If Jesus Christ is a man—  
And only a man—I say  
That of all mankind I cleave to him  
And to him I will cleave alway.

#### WAS JESUS REALLY MAN?

But was the figure we call Jesus of Nazareth really a man? The perfect sinless personality reported in the gospels is so far above our achievements that it has been hard for many to believe that he was a real person living historically in Palestine. In the second century the Marcionite movement held that the life of Christ was that of spirit only and his bodily form a mere phantom. It was to answer this heresy that the Old Roman Symbol, the forerunner of the Apostles' Creed, was formulated. This fact explains the use of so many words to stress the physical aspects of Jesus' life: ". . . suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried." The compilers of the creed were emphasizing the fact that Jesus Christ was fully man.

No longer do responsible writers raise the question whether a man named Jesus once lived in Nazareth. More critical study has been given to him than to any other his-

torical figure. So great was his impact on his countrymen that men began to write about him shortly after his crucifixion. Within twenty years letters dealing with Jesus were being written by a Roman citizen, who at first had hated the Nazarene, but who had been so transformed by the Crucified One that he was willing to die for him. Many other documents appeared. Collected "sayings" of Jesus were afloat before the gospels were in form.

And within a generation after Jesus' death, the gospel by Mark took shape, to be followed shortly by Matthew and Luke and somewhat later by John. The gospels were the work of writers with differing personalities and diverse points of view, but the four portraits of Jesus do not clash.

A friend recently wrote asking: "Why is it that the gospels never mention that Jesus smiled? Certainly he must have enjoyed humor and laughter." The question serves to remind us how many features of Jesus' personality are omitted from the record. No one tells us whether he was tall or short, light or dark. The authors of the gospels were not primarily concerned to record the physical appearance of the Nazarene, for his character was so luminous that his body was left in shadow. The gospel portraits are impressionistic rather than photographic. Furthermore the gospels were not written primarily to furnish exact and chronological biographical data, but rather to explain why his followers could not forget him and continued to keep faith in him.

Nevertheless, we can be pretty sure of the salient facts of Jesus' earthly career. We see the young carpenter in his shop at Nazareth brooding over the burdens of his people, his heart troubled by their sins and sorrows, his mind filled with longing to help them. He learns of the stir being caused by the dramatic preaching of John the Baptist. He goes to hear him. He is baptized in the Jordan for the sins of his people. He leaves the carpenter shop to teach the abundant life possible in what he calls the Kingdom of God. He manifests such amazing power of healing that throngs follow

him. His popularity opens the way for possible political leadership. But he turns away from the cheering crowds and takes a course which leads to a cross. He is determined to die, if need be, to save his people. Though his motive is love and his mission is salvation, he is arrested as a disturber of the peace. With no bitterness toward his accusers, "with malice toward none and charity for all," he goes gallantly to his death, praying from his cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."<sup>1</sup>

The records of Jesus' career not only securely buttress the belief that he actually lived but also they convince us that he was the kind of man we can believe in. He grew up as other boys grow, increasing in stature, maturing in wisdom, ripening into "favor with God and man."<sup>2</sup> His body was beset with the hungers and pains which are common to us. He was human enough to say at least on one occasion, "I thirst." He could become tired. We are told that under the weight of the cross he stumbled. Yet he so triumphed over the "ills that flesh is heir to" that his biographers never report him talking about his health. He was "tempted as we are, yet without sinning."<sup>3</sup> He lived under oppressive conditions, but his spirit was never broken. He was a patriot, but he was no narrow nationalist, and he died not only for his friends and country but for all the world, even his enemies. He was offered a crown, but it did not tempt him. He faced a cross, but it did not harden or break his heart. He lived what he taught and died for what he lived.

It is because Jesus was a man like ourselves that his triumph over sin and pain and death takes hold of our hearts. We need for our Savior not one who merely tells us how we ought to feel and what we ought to be, but one who has actually lived the victorious life for which we long.

Uncounted writers have tried to describe Jesus, but no book about him is completely satisfying. Among all the art-

<sup>1</sup>Luke 23:34.

<sup>2</sup>Luke 2:52.

<sup>3</sup>Hebrews 4:15.

ists who have tried to paint him, we feel none has done him full justice. Millions have set out to follow him, but no one has ever fully succeeded. He is ever beyond us. His perfection baffles us. But we cannot give him up, for his love will not let us go.

The recorded words of Jesus do not answer all the questions which men bring to him, nor does he give solutions for all men's problems. He was not a lawyer, or an economist, or a scientist. But he showed us the spirit in which we are to approach each particular situation. He gave us principles which are applicable to every conceivable problem. He did not confine his answers to definitions but pointed directions, and while time outgrows definitions, it does not outrun directions. For that reason Jesus is "the same yesterday and today and for ever."<sup>4</sup> If we want to see human life in perfect fullness, there is one place to look, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the universal and eternal man.

As he stood on the eve of his death, he is reported as saying to his disciples: ". . . believe in God, believe also in me."<sup>5</sup> And if we believe in God, we can hardly fail to believe in Jesus of Nazareth as a man, for he is the most godlike man we have seen or can imagine.

### IS JESUS THE CHRIST?

But we cannot fully explain Jesus of Nazareth by thinking of him as the world's greatest man. His supremacy as teacher, healer, and leader was not a human achievement. Jesus was not just a young man who "made good" above all others.

In all his ministry Jesus' main object was not to get men to love him but to set men loving God. He was ever seeking to turn attention from himself to his Heavenly Father. He reminded his hearers that his teachings were not his own but

<sup>4</sup>Hebrews 13:8.

<sup>5</sup>John 14:1.

God's, that his power of healing was not of himself but of God, that they were not to think of his goodness but of God's. As Dean Inge put it, "Christ came to earth to reveal to us not that he was like God but that God was like himself." ". . . whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus stressed not only that God was like himself but that God had sent him. When he gave his first sermon in his home town of Nazareth, he appropriated to himself the words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."<sup>7</sup> His Nazarene neighbors marveled at his words and in amazement asked, "Is not this Joseph's son?"<sup>8</sup> The Galilean peasants "were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority."<sup>9</sup> There was the ring of rightness in his words which set chords of assent vibrating in the back of their minds. With them as with us, the whole nature responded to him. The plain people did not know how to explain it, but Nicodemus, the Pharisee scholar, hit on the truth when he came to Jesus by night and began by saying: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."<sup>10</sup>

A little later, according to the record, a Samaritan woman came to this same conclusion that God was speaking through Jesus, for after he had opened up to her a new glimpse into the depths of her own life, she ran to tell her neighbors crying: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"<sup>11</sup>

Also those who worked and lived with him most closely began to be convinced that Jesus was voicing the very mind of God. In Caesarea Philippi the Master asked his disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" And they told him, 'John

<sup>6</sup>Mark 9:37.

<sup>7</sup>Luke 4:18.

<sup>8</sup>Luke 4:22.

<sup>9</sup>Mark 1:22.

<sup>10</sup>John 3:2.

<sup>11</sup>John 4:29.



the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets.' And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.'<sup>12</sup> Although Jesus "charged the disciples to tell no one,"<sup>13</sup> the belief spread that he was the Christ, that is, "the anointed, the sent of God."

After the crucifixion the conviction that Jesus was the Christ mounted with a mighty leap. The voice heard in Galilee was not silenced by the cross. The sorrowing Mary was convinced that she caught the words of the risen Christ in the garden outside the tomb. The same evening two disciples became sure that they had Christ as companion on the Emmaus road. Forty days later Peter in his Pentecostal address confidently asserted: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."<sup>14</sup>

Months passed and Saul of Tarsus heard a voice that would not be stilled calling: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"<sup>15</sup> Saul opened the door of his heart to the One whose very name he hated, and later came to say, "For me to live is Christ."<sup>16</sup>

Some thousand years pass and the gay son of a wealthy Italian merchant thought that he heard the voice of Christ bidding him dismount and minister to a despised leper. In yielding obedience to the Christ's voice, that young man became known to the world as Saint Francis of Assisi, whose luminous life shines through the centuries.

Almost another thousand years pass and in far-off India a missionary hears a Hindu exclaim, after reading the parable of the prodigal son, "This Jesus must have known me; he has told my story." The story of Jesus never grows old because he is ever telling the reader's own story.

What started and sustained this growing belief that Jesus

<sup>12</sup>Mark 8:27,29.

<sup>13</sup>Matthew 16:20.

<sup>14</sup>Acts 2:36.

<sup>15</sup>Acts 9:4.

<sup>16</sup>Philippians 1:21.

of Nazareth is the Christ, the Anointed One sent of God? For one thing, it was his words. Not only did Jesus utter sayings of such beauty and wisdom that he merited the title of the Master Teacher; not only did he speak words which winged their way into the hearts of men and kept singing there; but he also said things which marked him either as God or else not a good man. Hear the audacious statement made to his disciples: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."<sup>17</sup> And again: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."<sup>18</sup> And this: "I and the Father are one."<sup>19</sup>

Such words could be derived only from delusion, deceit, or divinity. But the character and work of Jesus disprove the charge that he was deluded or deceitful. If we believe in Jesus as the ideal man, as the centuries have increasingly come to do, then his sayings force us to conclude that he had the divine right to speak as God in Christ.

Moreover, Jesus radiated a power more convincing than his words. He made men feel the presence of God. Trying to describe the effect Jesus had on others, the Fourth Gospel says, ". . . we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."<sup>20</sup>

And more, Jesus not only revealed God's power; he imparted it. ". . . to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."<sup>21</sup> Jesus was no mere star performer, dazzling spectators with his feats of wonder. He was a team player, linking himself with others, infusing them with his strength. He teamed up with Simon, the fisherman of turbulent temper who could not control his own cowardice, and transformed him into Peter,

<sup>17</sup>Luke 10:16.<sup>18</sup>Luke 10:22.<sup>19</sup>John 10:30.<sup>20</sup>John 1:14.<sup>21</sup>John 1:12.

the master of his passions and the brave leader of his fellow disciples.

And what Jesus did during his earthly ministry, he continued to do after his crucifixion. He so affected Saul of Tarsus who never saw him in the flesh, who at first hated the mention of his name, that he came to say, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me."<sup>22</sup> And he who changed the bitter Saul into the beloved Paul is still putting godliness into lives. He restores man's inner sense of royal worth and makes him "loyal to the royal" in his nature.

When we consider the words and the works of Jesus, they take on an eternal, world-altering significance. In the gospels and the good that has gone on from them, we apprehend not so much truths about God as God himself in action. We see Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed of God, and also the Incarnation, the "enmanment," of God. Permit an analogy. Electric power has been in the physical order from the beginning, but it was not until Ben Franklin caught it on his kite and key that electricity was brought down to be harnessed by man. Likewise the Christ Spirit was in the universe from the beginning, coeternal with God. ". . . before Abraham was, I am," John interprets Jesus as saying.<sup>23</sup> But it was only in the fullness of time that God sent forth his Son in the physical form of the historic Jesus to incarnate himself among men. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."<sup>24</sup> "And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace."<sup>25</sup>

The carpenter who lived in Galilee was a real man, Jesus of Nazareth. He was also the Christ, the Incarnation of God.

#### HOW CAN WE SAY, "HIS ONLY SON"?

If God is the Father of all men, then all men may consider themselves sons of God. "See what love the Father has

<sup>22</sup>Philippians 4:13.

<sup>23</sup>John 8:58.

<sup>24</sup>John 1:14.

<sup>25</sup>John 1:16.

given us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are."<sup>26</sup> Why then should Jesus be called "His only Son"?

According to the gospels Jesus was made aware of his unique sonship at the time of his baptism. ". . . and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.'"<sup>27</sup> Again on the Mount of Transfiguration, a voice came saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."<sup>28</sup>

And while he taught his followers to pray, "Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,"<sup>29</sup> he also spoke of God as Father in terms reserved only for himself: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father."<sup>30</sup> On the lips of any other person such words would seem blasphemous, but we do not feel them irreverent when spoken by Jesus. "Quietly, with a sweet reasonableness that partook of nothing of the madman, doing like Socrates the practical works of virtue, he said: 'I am the light of the world. My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Here was the astounding surprise—not just a good man, not just an ethical teacher, but the Son of God, for whom all time was declared to have been preparing."<sup>31</sup>

The impression left by Jesus on his seasoned followers was not merely that of a man who reflected God as a lake mirrors the moon, or that of one who lived and worked *as if* God were among men. Jesus identified himself too closely with God for that. In Jesus Christ we have no mere doctrine about God but the descent of God himself. The gospel record of Christ is a story which narrates "the mighty acts of God."

And the force of the story is enhanced by the fact that it

<sup>26</sup>1 John 3:1.

<sup>27</sup>Mark 1:11.

<sup>28</sup>Mark 9:7.

<sup>29</sup>Luke 11:2.

<sup>30</sup>Luke 10:22.

<sup>31</sup>Howard Lowry, *The Mind's Adventure* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 89.

is told by men who at first were profoundly disappointed in him. They had expected a Messiah who would free the people of Israel from political bondage, but he refused a crown. They were looking for a leader who would demonstrate a divine power convincing to the world, but he was a penniless carpenter who died upon a cross. In a time when the Jews were demanding signs and the Greeks were seeking wisdom, to preach the crucified Christ as the Son of God was "a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles."<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless within a decade or two after that ignominious crucifixion, his followers were finding in "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."<sup>23</sup>

What turned the disappointment of the disciples into confidence that Christ was the unique Son of God? It could hardly be asserted that it was solely the uniqueness of Christ's birth, for Saint Paul, who so strongly declared the divine power of Christ, as quoted above, does not mention the Virgin Birth. The Fourth Gospel tells of the Incarnation of the eternal Word but without reference to the Immaculate Conception.

Matthew and Luke give their accounts of Christ's conception and birth without human fatherhood. This is the traditional belief held by the majority of Christians. As a supernatural event it should be no harder to believe than many others. The greater miracle is the unique blending of the godhead with full manhood in Jesus Christ. The fact of the Incarnation is harder to grasp than the method of it. Whether or not we find it difficult to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, let us remember that Saint Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, together with countless other Christians, have been convinced of the deity of Jesus Christ without reference to the uniqueness of his birth.

The belief in the uniqueness of Christ as God's only Son gripped the minds of men because of his moral and spiritual

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:24.

grandeur. With Martin Luther men have discovered that when they take hold of Jesus as man they find him to be God. The moral miracle of the centuries is Jesus' sinless perfection. The better a man is, the more conscious he is of his sins. But no sense of sin darkened Jesus' mind or interrupted his fellowship with his Heavenly Father. He was "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning."<sup>84</sup> He always had himself under complete control. When the crowd flattered, he did not lose his head or conscience. When the crowd jeered and cursed, he did not lose his nerve or his temper. He never gave way to bitterness under the bludgeons of his critics nor to revenge when the opposition weakened.

Jesus was master of physical circumstances. He was poor, yet he never gave the impression of being poverty-stricken. His sources of satisfaction seemed so independent of money and material surroundings. His environment was lacking in so much of what we call "the good things of life," yet he lived the richest and most abundant life ever revealed.

He was master of pain. As a physician, he sought to banish from men all needless suffering. But when inevitable pain came, he stood up to it. Jesus in Gethsemane prayed that the cup of suffering might pass from him. Nevertheless, he drank it, drank it with the smile of a gallant sportsman, saying to his comrades, ". . . be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."<sup>85</sup> He endured the indescribable pain of the cross without losing his love for those who inflicted it, or his faith in his Heavenly Father who permitted it.

And the supreme test of Jesus' power was his mastery of death. The conquest of death includes banishing the fear of it. Jesus was aware that he was soon to die. He had an incurable disease, the longing of love, which he knew for months would lead to his death. What would we do if we were told that we had but six months to live? Would we try

<sup>84</sup>Hebrews 4:15.

<sup>85</sup>John 16:33.

to drive out the dread thought by excessive and nerve-deadening indulgence? Or would we grow morbid, talking too much about death? Jesus did none of these things. He walked toward his death with such seeming unconcern for his own danger that his closest friends could not believe that he was going to die. And when at last his body was hanging in agony on the bloody nails, there was still something so majestic about him that a dying thief beside him turned to him with the plea, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power."<sup>36</sup> Jesus was still kingly even on the cross.

Then came the end that was not the end. "And the third day he rose again from the dead." So asserts the Apostles' Creed, thus expressing a conviction which has grown with the centuries. Speaking personally, I must confess that the accounts of Christ's resurrection present some difficulties which my reason cannot resolve. But when I let my mind lie open to the record and allow each gospel to bring its wave of testimony in on my thought, I feel a rising tide of conviction that Christ did triumph over the grave.

The sorrowful mourners going out in the early morning to anoint the body of their departed leader; the experience at the tomb which sent them rushing back to bring the disciples; the evening walk to Emmaus when a mysterious presence accompanied two disciples and made their "hearts burn within them" on the way; the upper room a week later with the disciples gathered around the still-doubting Thomas, and then his cry of conviction, "My Lord and my God"—these are the Easter reports, and they are told with such restraint and artlessness that I cannot believe them to be mere inventions.

Nor can I regard them as ghost stories told by deluded, though perhaps honest, persons. What ghost ever had the effect of producing moral grandeur in the persons who thought they saw him? Yet that is what the resurrection did

<sup>36</sup>Luke 23:42.

for the disciples. It transformed them from defeated refugees into triumphant radiant heralds proclaiming a risen Lord.

If men can believe that the simple unpolished authors of the synoptic gospels, writing at different times and places, invented and articulated the Easter stories; if men can believe that the Christian church began by preaching a myth and has spread itself by proclaiming a falsehood, producing the fruits of righteousness and growing until it numbers over a fourth of the globe's population, then they may dismiss the Easter evidence. But for myself, I find it harder to explain away than to explain.

Christ's mastery over life and death defies explanation on human grounds. The Roman centurion stationed at the cross, after watching Jesus die, exclaimed, "Truly this man was a son of God!"<sup>87</sup> After seeing how Christ has refused to die the centuries call back, "Truly this man was *the* son of God!"

### HOW IS JESUS CHRIST "OUR LORD"?

After the crucifixion of Christ came a resurrection of faith quite as remarkable as the resurrection of his body. The persecution and death of the world's perfect man plumbed the depths of human depravity. It revealed the sin of the human race and not of any one race. Measured morally, it was earth's darkest day. Why then has it come to be called "Good Friday" rather than "Black Friday"? How did the cross come to make men think of God's goodness rather than of his cruelty? It would have seemed natural for the followers of Jesus after beholding his death to ask: "How can God be good when he allows the best man who ever lived to be cruelly crucified?"

And the cross does belie God's goodness, if Jesus is seen simply as a brave good man battling against evil. However,

<sup>87</sup>Mark 15:39.



that was not the view which the disciples took. Through the tears of their sorrow, they caught the secret which Jesus had been trying to tell them. He had said, ". . . be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."<sup>38</sup> He did not die as a beaten man driven to the wall. His hand was not forced by his enemies. He said of his life, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."<sup>39</sup> He was fulfilling his divinely chosen mission. He gave his life as the Son of God to demonstrate the depth of divine love. Saint Paul summed up the purpose of it all: ". . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."<sup>40</sup> When this realization broke on their minds, the Christians beheld the cross as the goodness of God and not as his cruelty. Thus "Black Friday" became "Good Friday."

After beholding how Jesus lived and loved and died and triumphed over death, after "abiding in his words and letting his words abide in them," the followers of the Nazarene could be satisfied with no lesser title for him than Lord. They were convinced, as the Apostles' Creed puts it, that he had "ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God." In the words of Peter before the Jerusalem council: "The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior."<sup>41</sup> This belief, embodied in the Creed, has been embedded in the hearts of Christians.

Think what it means to call Jesus Christ "our Lord." The world in which we live wears an enigmatic face—a face at times as ugly as sin and again as beautiful as an angel, as cruel as a sea in storm and as tender as a woman in love. It is a world of snakes and stars, of laughter and tears, of contradictions and confusion. And out of this tangled skein of human experience nineteen centuries of Christian thought have selected one section as the key to the whole pattern. It

<sup>38</sup> John 16:33.<sup>39</sup> John 10:18.<sup>40</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19.<sup>41</sup> Acts 5:30-31.

is the brief biography of Jesus, that strange man on the cross, who from his bloodstained throne has so ruled the hearts of men that they call him the "Lord Jesus Christ." "The affirmation that Christ is the end of history signifies that in his life, death and resurrection the meaning of man's historic existence is fulfilled."<sup>42</sup>

How can such a stupendous claim be sustained? When Jesus was brought to Pilate for trial, Pilate asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight." Pilate was puzzled. He went on: "So you are a king?" Jesus replied: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice."<sup>43</sup>

Thus the gospels present Christ's ruling Lordship as founded on the fact that his principles tally with eternal truth. Jesus stood before Pilate as a great scientist might stand in the laboratory where he had worked out a new discovery. The skeptics might say that his claims were false, and the public might rant against them. But the scientist remains calm and sure because he knows that he bears witness to the truth. He, like our Lord, knows that the centuries will testify for him as against the hours.

And time has vindicated Christ's claim as Lord of the Kingdom of Truth. At first hearing he is often dismissed by the realists as a dreamer, but after a nightmare of Christless living, men wake up to the rightness of Jesus. Lovers of life may scorn the teachings of the Galilean as too puritanical and restrictive. They go forth like prodigal sons to run the gamut of worldly pleasures, but in their effort to see life their eyes are opened to the truth which Francis Thompson,

<sup>42</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 139.

<sup>43</sup>John 18:33, 36, 37.

the young medical student, discovered after he had fled the way of Christ through every winding passage of worldliness. Thompson felt the "Hound of Heaven" at his heels "with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace"; and he heard over his shoulder the voice of the Christ: "All things betray thee who betrayest me." And so they do. When we play false to Christ, we prove untrue to ourselves.

The Lordship of Christ is manifest in the fact that he is the Inescapable Reality. The Fourth Gospel contains a statement which outruns its immediate context with continuing wonder. It is this: ". . . The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them."<sup>44</sup> The particular scene was the room in which the disciples were trying to convince the doubting Thomas of Christ's triumph over death. The doors were closed. The hostile world was locked out. They would guard against any intrusion into their intimate circle. But closed doors could not shut out the Christ.

The principles which Christ revealed are as inescapable as the laws of light revealed in the rising sun. The doors of a situation can no more be locked against his laws than they can be locked against the force of gravity. That sounds like one of the superlatives to which the pulpit is addicted. But when we look into it, we see its truth.

Consider the situation of the home. A young husband and wife bind themselves together to establish a home. They are strong, capable, seemingly self-sufficient. A good income guarantees their union against the inroads of want. They love each other and are loyal to each other. They are able to give their children excellent schooling, healthy bodies, good times. Nothing else apparently is needed. The family circle seems a self-sustaining whole. So they shut the doors against the intrusions of religion.

But how long can that family or any other keep closed against the entrance of issues which Christ raised and the

<sup>44</sup>John 20:26.

principles he embodied? For instance, the principle of vicarious love: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."<sup>45</sup> Or the divine source which started and replenishes human love: "We love, because he first loved us."<sup>46</sup> Or the Spirit of Truth which Christ said he was sending to lead men into all truth and convict them in respect of sin.<sup>47</sup>

The principles of Christ are so inescapable that homes cannot be run without confronting them. They present themselves in various ways. Sometimes dramatically in the derelictions of a daughter or son. Sometimes beautifully in the questions which come bubbling to the surface of a child's open and inquiring mind. Sometimes dismally through the invasion of death, when unprepared minds face the fact of the grave and, panic-stricken, try to read its meaning through tear-dimmed eyes.

Consider the situation of business. "Business is business," we may say. It is a competitive game, a battle of wits, and anything short of the referee's whistle goes. We will have no sentimental uplifters talking to us about the service motive and Christ's principles in business. What does the pulpit know about handling money? (To be sure, businessmen have a point there. They do not give preachers too much to handle!) Let us grant that the minister of the gospel should not pose as an economic expert, but when men try to run business divorced from all the motives and methods of Christ, they fall into vicious circles of cutthroat competition, reckless inflation, and paralyzing depression. Men may close the business world against Christ, but sooner or later he comes, the doors being shut, and stands among them.

Lift the vision to the horizon of governments. Here certainly is a realm where Christ's principles must not be confused with political theories. Governments are not persons and cannot operate according to individual standards, we are told. A government is a superpersonal organization set

<sup>45</sup>Galatians 6:2.

<sup>46</sup>1 John 4:19.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. John 16:7-13.

up to look after the welfare of the human beings under its jurisdiction. And in order to shepherd its own, does it not sometimes have to be inhuman toward others? The taking of life, as among citizens within its borders, is punished as murder, but the taking of life by one government against another is called war, and skill in such killing receives the highest medals of honor. Bearing false witness by neighbors against neighbors is despicable, but among the chief instruments of governments in war are false propaganda and spy systems. Many rules of right and wrong between individuals are regarded as suicidal if applied to governments.

Thus has reasoned many a political philosopher from Machiavelli down to Nietzsche, who called Christian ethics a slave morality and one sure to undermine any land which practiced it. But Nietzsche died in a madhouse though not living to see the principles which he advocated overwhelm his own German nation in World War I. And now after a repetition of that ghastly slaughter, here, midway in the bloodiest century of recorded history, more and more thoughtful statesmen are saying, "It is Christ or chaos."

One clear conviction which has been distilled from the seething cauldron of bloodshed in two global wars is the utter folly of trying to develop law-abiding citizens within nations while the governments themselves are left lawless. There must be codes of law for international as well as interpersonal action. And into those codes must go the principles of the Prince of Peace, even though his name be not mentioned.

Inescapable and eventually irresistible, the personality and principles of Jesus Christ bestride the world. At first glance Jesus of Nazareth appears a frail figure amid the forces that loom so large on the earth's stage. Between the blustering Herod who overshadowed his birth and the pompous Pilate who presided at his death, the Nazarene carpenter seemed scarcely worthy of the historian's notice.

But those two pretentious figures would now be forgotten were it not for their connection with the Christ. And when the names that today fill the headlines are lost to memory, increasing millions will continue to sing Christmas carols. We do not outlive Jesus Christ because he is Lord of Life.

When soldiers go forth to battle full of strength, they cheer their leaders, even though they be dictators like Napoleon and Hitler, but when those soldiers are carried back in the agony of their wounds, they call for another Leader. It is one thing to be the champion for whom men cheer in the hour of victory; it is something more to be the champion for whom men call in the hour of defeat and death. Jesus Christ is Lord of our dying as of our living.

#### WHY DO WE CALL CHRIST THE "SAVIOR"?

Christ's triumph over life and death leads us to rise and sing with Handel, "Crown him King of kings and Lord of lords." But human hearts are held by the tenderness of Christ even more than by his triumph. It has been said that at twenty men want a leader, but at sixty they call for a Savior. Such a statement might seem to imply that the cry for salvation stems from weakness and fear. But it should not be so. "Jesus Savior, Pilot Me" is a hymn for youth starting out of life's harbor quite as much as for the aged voyager coming in.

And when we catch the spirit of the New Testament, we see that salvation is proclaimed not as an appeal to self-interest. "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."<sup>48</sup> And he was to save sinners, not primarily from the penalties of their sins, but from the sins themselves. Christ came to save men for life and service.

Christ revealed that the purpose of God is to save. The

<sup>48</sup>1 Timothy 1:15.

great Hebrew prophets had portrayed God as just and holy, Ruler of heaven and earth. The Old Testament had risen even to the idea of God as Father, though his Fatherhood was not vividly portrayed. But Jesus added a significantly new feature in his interpretation of God's nature.

And that new aspect is this: God takes the initiative in seeking his creatures before they seek him. Jesus pictures God, not as an enthroned Being waiting to be approached and appeased by his creatures, but as a Divine Shepherd going out to seek and to save the lost. The Psalmist had beautifully pictured God as a shepherd of whom he said, "He leads me beside the still waters."<sup>49</sup> But Jesus went further in his portrayal of the Good Shepherd, as one who leaves the ninety and nine to look for the lost.<sup>50</sup> Yes, still further: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."<sup>51</sup>

The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a seeking God, who sends out into the highways and byways, inviting men to his royal feast.<sup>52</sup> He is a God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."<sup>53</sup>

Jesus told men this truth, not only by the word of his mouth, but by the blood of his body. Jesus Christ was more than a martyr to a cause. He was making atonement for the sins of man. His suffering was more than the noble example of a man laying down his life for his friends. He was demonstrating how God gives that which is dearer than life. The death of Christ was a sacrifice, but not in the sense of the Old Testament sacrifices which were made in order to appease the anger and win the forgiveness of God. The crucifixion of Christ was the sacrifice God made to win the repentance and love of his erring children. Thus the cross is seen, not as a penalty paid to God, but as the price paid by

<sup>49</sup>Psalm 23:2.<sup>50</sup>Cf. Matthew 18:12.<sup>51</sup>John 10:11.<sup>52</sup>Cf. Matthew 22:9.<sup>53</sup>John 3:16:

God in giving the last full measure of devotion for his erring children.

And love has a saving power far beyond that of law. In Marc Connelly's drama, *Green Pastures*, God is shown looking down over the world, pondering what more he can do to save it. He had sent a flood and plagues and laws, yet men continued to sin. Then he sees the shadows of Hosea on the wall outside his office. Hosea was the prophet who had endured anguish to win back his unfaithful wife, and out of that personal experience he reached the conviction that God suffers to bring back his sinning children. Seeing Hosea's shadow, God asks his angel Gabriel if he too thinks that God must suffer to save his people. Gabriel nods assent. Thereupon the play proceeds, and shortly God is looking down over the earth again and he says, "I see a young man carrying a cross up a hill." That cross is love's last word.

" . . . the law was our custodian until Christ came."<sup>54</sup> Law convicts, love converts. Law can induce remorse, love can quicken to repentance. Law restrains, love empowers. That is why Christ becomes the power of God unto salvation.

When we receive from Christ the conception of God as a Father seeking us, we are stirred with a new confidence and expectancy. A boyhood experience offers a pale parallel, yet one which lingers in my mind. One night when I was riding home from school in the gathering dusk, my horse took fright, suddenly whirled, threw me over his head, and dashed away. The road was deserted, the snow deep, the horse gone. For a twelve-year-old boy several miles from home, it seemed a pretty dark moment, even a tearful one. But I had the sense to know that if I kept to the road toward home, my father would eventually come out to look for me. That is what I did and that is what he did. Father was concerned to know what was keeping his boy beyond the time

<sup>54</sup>Galatians 3:24.



of his expected return. For a lad on a lonely dark road it is great comfort to have a father who seeks.

And when through the gospel we glimpse how far out Heavenly Father has come to seek and save—even to the cross—we cry with Isaac Watts:

Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Yet that demand, however clearly I may recognize it, is beyond my own strength to meet. If we are to be saved, we must not only feel the call but receive the power. And this is what comes when we open the doors of our minds and hearts to let the Lord Christ in. The late Emmet Fox gave what he called the "Golden Key" to prayer. It is this: "Stop thinking about the difficulty whatever it is and think about God instead." He went on to say that we should not look back over our shoulders to see how things are coming; just let the trouble stay behind and think positive thoughts like these: "God is love," "God is wisdom." The principle is valid, but personally I find such words as "love" and "wisdom" too vague and abstract. Christ, however, makes God vivid to me. When I let my mind dwell on the historic Jesus walking the roads of Palestine, clear of eye, calm of voice, compassionate of heart; when I think of his courage as he faced his critics and of his undimmed confidence as he went to his cross—I find my nerves quieting, my mind clearing, my spirits rising.

And when we hold our minds steadily enough on Christ to let his words sink in, we discover the truth of his statement: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples."<sup>55</sup> Christ gets down into the unconscious, where dwell the feelings, the affections, the drives of life. Our tastes become converted and we learn to like what Christ likes. We

<sup>55</sup>John 8:31.

are freed from the tension between duty and desire. We are loosed from the lure of low, mean impulses. Our affections are enlarged and we see good in those we never noticed and in those we even disliked. We become "in heart and conscience free," for a heart is free only when it is pumping its love out into the arteries of purposes larger than self.

When we receive Christ into the surrendered will, the open mind, and the loving heart, then the God for whom we have been groping becomes the God who grips us. A lawyer, speaking at a college occasion in my presence, expressed his religious experience in a most convincing fashion. He told of being taken as a little lad by his father on a visit to New York City. To keep from getting lost in the crowd he held to his father's finger. But after a while his little legs grew tired, his fingers began to lose their grip, and he looked up at his father and said, "You'll have to take hold of my hand now, for I can't hold on much longer." The lawyer added that in the world as it is he needed what he had needed as a boy, the feel of a father's grip to hold and save him. And that is the kind of Heavenly Father we feel through the power of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

Why do we pray "through Jesus Christ, our Lord"?

Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it."<sup>56</sup> He did not promise that we could pray for anything we wanted and expect it to be granted. There is popularly current a shallow interpretation of prayer which would lead us

<sup>56</sup>John 14:13.

to believe that if we just desire a thing hard enough God will grant it. Suppose we could. What confusion it would cause. My wishes might run counter to yours and our neighbors' desires might interfere with both of us. We would all be lobbying for our own personal interests.

But when we pray "through Jesus Christ, our Lord," the thought of him sifts the selfish motives from our petitions. There are some things we cannot sincerely ask for in Christ's name. We can pray for help in our business, but only provided the aim of our work is to further the good of men and the program of Christ. We can pray for victory in war "through Christ our Lord," provided we are seeking the reign of righteousness and not merely the success of our side.

Also, when we pray in Christ's name, we humbly admit that we feel our right to receive is through his grace and not our own merit. We are unworthy servants who deserve little and have no right to demand more, but through Christ we "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" "where mercy seasons justice."

**Why does the pulpit tell us that we must either choose Christ or not? Why can we not just form our opinion as we do about any great person?**

In a way we do something about every great character we confront. When, for instance, we read of Albert Schweitzer and his work in Africa, our minds inevitably register some response to that kind of a life, either for or against it. And our reaction does something in and to our natures.

When we view the beautiful, the true, or the good with approval, we enlarge and enrich our natures. On the other hand, if our response is negative, we harden ourselves and reduce our future receptivity.

Now Christ embodied the ultimate values of beauty, truth, and goodness so incomparably that his followers felt him to be the very incarnation of God's life-giving forces. They said: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."<sup>57</sup> We

<sup>57</sup>John 1:4.

cannot be neutral in regard to life's elemental forces. There are some things about which we cannot suspend our judgments indefinitely any more than we can hold our breath indefinitely.

Christ embodied the values, the principles, the forces toward which we cannot preserve neutrality. Listen to his sweeping statement: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."<sup>58</sup>

In human society there is a gathering force of love which holds men together just as in the physical realm there is a centripetal force of gravity which holds the elements of earth to its center. Also there is a scattering force of hate which causes society to fly apart as the centrifugal force whisks objects away from the center.

Christ with his love gathers men together and to God. By our deeds, our words, even our thoughts, during every waking moment we are making for unity or disunity. We are either gatherers with Christ through love or we are scatterers through selfishness, skepticism, and hatred. Here then is one basic reason why we have to choose what we shall do with Christ.

**In repeating the Apostles' Creed some say of Christ, "He descended into hell." What does this mean and why do some churches omit it?**

There are two interpretations commonly given to this clause. To John Calvin it meant that Christ really bore in his soul the full experience of condemned and ruined man.<sup>59</sup> Karl Barth shares much the same view: "If God had not become man in Jesus Christ, had not descended to that deepest ultimate concealment of his divinity, in truth we neither could nor would know what sin and therefore what judgment is."<sup>60</sup>

Christ had to run the whole gamut of human experience, even to that of hell, in order to be fully the Savior of men.

The other explanation of the words is that they are based

<sup>58</sup>Luke 11:23.

<sup>59</sup>*Institutes* II, xvi, 10.

<sup>60</sup>Karl Barth, *Credo* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 90.

on the statement, “. . . he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey.”<sup>61</sup> This is thought to refer to those who had died before Jesus was born. If Christ is the bringer of salvation, are those to be left unredeemed who died before he came? This would seem inconsistent with divine justice. Hence to give them the opportunity of salvation, Christ descended into hell and preached to the spirits in prison there.

While I cannot speak for the churches which omit the clause from the Creed, I personally believe the words to be unnecessary. I do not feel it necessary to say that Christ descended into hell in order to emphasize that he entered into the full experiences of humanity. That may be taken for granted.

Also I believe that God, being holy and just, makes merciful provision for those who died in pre-Christian times. God in his infinite compassion judges men according to their lights and opportunities. Therefore we can trust God's treatment, without the necessity of Christ's descent into hell.

**If Christ had to die on the cross in order to fulfill God's plan, why should we condemn Judas?**

If we were to say that no blame attaches to Judas for his betrayal of Jesus, then by the same logic we would have to say that no credit belongs to Christ for going to the cross. When we say that the death of Christ was part of God's plan of redemption, we must not think of the characters at Calvary as helpless pawns moved by a divine hand. On the stage of life the players always have some freedom even though the drama moves toward God's ends. Judas made his choice when he turned against his Lord just as Jesus made his choice in Gethsemane to accept the cross.

**What do Christians mean when they speak of being saved “through the blood of Christ”?**

“Through the blood of Christ” is an expression derived from Old Testament terminology and may easily prove misleading

<sup>61</sup> 1 Peter 3: 19-20.

when set in New Testament context. The blood was the symbol of life in the victim sacrificed on the altar by the worshipers of Jehovah. Some ancient theories of the Atonement interpreted the event after the Hebrew pattern as the sacrifice of Christ to appease God's anger against sinful man. Thus regarded, Christ was said to have paid for our sins and to have saved us by his blood.

But we no longer think of God as having to be reconciled. We believe with Saint Paul that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."<sup>62</sup> It was to bring his children back to him that God "gave his only begotten Son." Thus, Christ's death was a sacrifice made *by* God and not *to* God. Therefore, we are "saved by the blood of Christ" in the sense that his demonstration of divine love draws us from our sins to the heart of our suffering Heavenly Father.

**If Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, was he then praying to himself when he prayed?**

Even ministers have asked this question. What puzzles us here is due to our difficulty in understanding how Jesus Christ was fully man and fully God. That is a miracle which is ever a mystery to our finite minds.

Suffice it to say here that, while Jesus Christ is God incarnate, there is more to God than was encompassed in the form which lay in the manger at Bethlehem and hung on the cross at Calvary. That truth is expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."<sup>63</sup> But he also said, "My Father is working still, and I am working."<sup>64</sup> They were at one and yet they were two "persons."

Hence Jesus prayed to his Father and not to himself.

**If Christ is divine, how are we to understand his words on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"**

Christ could not be our Savior in all the experiences of life unless he plumbed the depth of every human experience. There are times when our spirits sink so low that we think even

<sup>62</sup>2 Corinthians 5:19.

<sup>63</sup>John 10:30.

<sup>64</sup>John 5:17.

God has forsaken us. Agony has no deeper abyss, and it was into this that Jesus Christ entered while his body hung on the bloody cross and the jeering crowd struck him with their stony stares.

The words "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" are the opening cry of the Twenty-second Psalm. It was as if, in his dying anguish, the words of scripture which he had learned in his youth came welling up and poured from his lips. For one brief moment our Lord descended into despair. But faith surged back and lifted him to a closing note of triumphant confidence: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!"<sup>65</sup>

**Could we not make Christ more popular and appealing if the pulpit stressed how practical his teachings are?**

We should certainly show the practical application of Jesus' teachings to everyday living. Jesus taught principles which can be applied to free us from many fears and anxieties, build up our health, make us socially more agreeable, and fill us with faith, energy, and hope. Christ is the Great Physician and we have still to explore and use many of his healing and helping powers.

But we must not repeat the mistake which the crowds made in his own day. At first they followed him in great numbers because he seemed to be giving them the health and happiness which they wanted, but they turned away when he began to talk about sacrifice and the cross. Preachers must beware lest in their desire to be popular they pick out what the crowd likes to hear and omit the stern and challenging aspects of the gospel. The late Ernest Tittle spoke out of experience when he said that the minister who tries to please the people makes a hit but the one who sticks to the truth is likely to get hit. We often hear it said that if the pulpit would give the people what they want they would come to church. But, alas, while the crowd knows what it wants, it does not always know what it needs.

There is surgery as well as sedative in Christ's teaching. Pain

<sup>65</sup>Luke 23:46.

sometimes is necessary for cure. Many things which prove best for us do not seem pleasing and practical to us at first. If we are to preach the full gospel, we must present Christ as Savior to bring men to God and not as supersalesmen to fill our pews.

### **Do the Christians by their emphasis on the cruelty of Christ's crucifixion tend to increase anti-Semitism?**

Many Jewish people feel that the Christian observance of Passion Week makes for ill feeling against the race that crucified Christ. It certainly should not do so. Intelligent Christians realize that the evil forces which effected Christ's death are not peculiar to any one race. They are common to all men. Institutional rivalry, narrow nationalism, economic greed, blind bigotry, personal selfishness—these were the moving sins which sent Christ to the cross. And they operate among all races.

Let Christians keep this truth clear and the Jews need have no fear.

### **Why should Christians seek converts from other religions? If people are sincere in their own faith, will they not get to heaven?**

We should not think of religion as merely a means of getting to heaven. Suppose we grant that the all-loving God will provide future welfare for the sincere followers of other faiths. But what about their welfare in this world?

The followers of Christ who really enter into his fellowship find a joy of living, a health of mind, a largeness of outlook, a sense of assurance, and many other values. Most of all, they are filled with a love that makes them long to share with others what they have found for themselves.

This desire to share is the only justifiable motive for Christian missions. The seeking of converts for the sake of increasing the institutional strength of one's own group as against some other is to be condemned as selfish. It is the selfish rivalry between religious groups which has made the word "proselyting" so obnoxious.

But to "Let your light so shine before men, that they may



see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven";<sup>66</sup> to send evangelists who share the good news of Christ's power to save from sin; to establish agricultural schools which help underfed people to have the standards of living attained by Christian countries; to plant doctors and hospitals in disease-depressed lands in order to spread the blessings of health brought by the Great Physician—all this is not selfish proselyting, but the generous expression of love.

### How can we believe in the miracles reported of Jesus?

So far as we can see, ours is a law-abiding natural order. But all its laws have by no means been discovered. The more of life we chart, the more we see remains to be explored and explained and mapped. In Pascal's words, "Reason's final move consists in recognizing that there are an infinity of things which go beyond her."

We may not know, for example, how Jesus made the lame to walk and the lepers to be clean. But because we do not understand the method, we need not deny the fact. Perhaps tomorrow we shall understand more clearly the diagnosis of the diseases described in the gospel records and more of the principles by which he effected his cures. However that may be, we need not think that Jesus did what he did by suspending or violating the laws held valid by medical science. What he did do was to bring into use forces deeper than modern science has yet fathomed.

More and more we are coming to recognize the power of mind and spirit over the body. Who would set limits to what the matchless mind and the sinless spirit of Jesus could do?

To a generation that has seen the atom bomb, to a generation that does not even know what this coming decade holds for it in physical changes, can the relatively simple miracles of our Lord appear incredible?

When a friend of mine asked me if I thought Christ could create the atom bomb, I answered that I believed in Jesus' divinity, which is a greater miracle than man can ever create.

<sup>66</sup>Matthew 5:16.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Belief in the Coming Judgment*

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"I believe . . . from thence He shall come to judge the quick  
and the dead"

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#### IS DIVINE JUDGMENT A THREAT OR A PROMISE?

If a speaker announced as his theme, "The Judgment Day," he would probably not draw many hearers. The subject sounds forbidding and, to some, even frightening. Our forefathers may have flocked to hear fiery evangelists picture the punishments of sin, but such sermons are not to our taste. Furthermore, the fear of hell is hardly a worthy motive for the good life.

We want no gloomy religion. Healthy growth does not take place in shadow. In order to be wholesome we need a sunny faith, and Jesus brought a joyous gospel. Let us hear then about such cheering things as faith and hope and love.

But wait a moment. Yonder is a fine young fellow who fell on the field of battle. He answered what he considered the call of patriotic duty and now his earthly life is cut off at twenty-one by a bullet. If there be no day of judgment where he receives compensation for the years he has lost, while some selfish old roué lives on in licentious indulgence, what becomes of our faith?

Or consider the graft and corruption now so rife. If dishonest greed can grow rich and live in luxury off the taxes

paid by poor honest people and there is no divine judgment to call those to account who slip through the loopholes of statutory law, what happens to our hope?

Or think of the little child, made for love as all children are, yet orphaned by the loss of its parents; what are we to say about the beauty and power of love if there be no Heavenly Judge to see that justice is done to little broken hearts? Thus we see that without divine judgment and justice, the blessings of faith and hope and love do not abide.

If God be not also a Judge, he could not be our Heavenly Father, for every true father has to exercise judgment in rearing his children. In short, divine justice is basic to our whole gospel.

But it does not need to be thought of as dark and gloomy. Recall the happy occasion when Simon Peter was called from Joppa to Caesarea by the invitation of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. It was the time when Peter generously rose above his racial discrimination and granted baptism to the Gentiles. Peter made a speech in which he expounded the grace of God in sending Christ to save all men who would believe in him. And then he added: "And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead."<sup>1</sup> Peter made this declaration not as a dire foreboding but as the promise of a confidence-inspiring fact.

#### HAS JUDGMENT DAY BEGUN?

Every day is a judgment day. Every time we confront the light and truth and love of God, we make a decision about it. Whenever we see the truth and reject it, we weaken our mental vitality and dull our moral vision. We call ourselves human beings, but we are really human "becomings." Life is continuous motion up or down, up toward good or down

<sup>1</sup>Acts 10:42.

toward evil, and every choice is a step one way or the other.

An act never stops with itself. When a thing is done, it is not done with. Action is followed by reaction, either direct or delayed. Every thought, even, leaves a trail. We speak of "idle thoughts," ideas which flash in and out of our minds without anything being done about them. But no thought is completely idle. When it is dismissed, it does not leave the house of the mind. Our minds have many rooms—the attic of memory, the sun parlor of hope, the cellar of the unconscious; and when thoughts and fancies drop down into the unconscious, strange things happen. Every day we are gathering the fruit of past thoughts and sowing for a future harvest.

Every hope we cherish, every picture we admire, every deed we do or refuse to do, carries its own contribution to our judgment. And when the final reckoning comes, every mark will count. Even our bodies register in some way our most serious thoughts. Gilbert Stuart painted so many portraits that he certainly qualified as an interpreter of facial features. After meeting the wily French politician, Talleyrand, who was on a visit to America, Stuart remarked: "If that man is not a scoundrel, God does not write a legible hand." Some of us, to be sure, would not want to be judged by our faces! Nevertheless, the older we grow, the more plainly our faces do tell things about us.

Every day by our thoughts, words, and deeds we are deciding the direction of the movement in our lives. Studdert Kennedy, the gallant British chaplain of World War I fame, said that he was arrested not so much by the thought that he might awaken tomorrow morning to confront the Judgment Day as by the thought that it is happening today.

Yet while every day is a judgment day, there are special days and periods of judgment. Our daily judgments may be registered so gently and quietly that we do not note them. Then suddenly they lurch into turbulence.

It may be some crisis of peril that reveals an underlying cowardice, or some signal opportunity which finds us unprepared because of our lack of diligence and alertness, or some strong and unexpected temptation which we cannot resist. As Professor Peabody of Harvard was wont to say, what we do in an emergency is the result of what we have been doing and thinking in the uneventful days which preceded. To all of us there come these days of special judgment which reveal whether we have been diligent or lazy, brave or cowardly, mean or generous in the preceding quieter periods.

And as it is with individuals, so is it with nations and cultures. Our modern society is now passing through a period of special judgment.

Consider, for example, the curtain now drawn between the Orient and the Occident. Many are prone to think how ungrateful are the people of China and India after all that our missionaries have done for them through the last century. To be sure, we have spent many millions of dollars in foreign missions to the peoples of Asia and Africa. But during those same decades the leading white nations of the world through commercialism and colonialism have taken billions out of those continents and have incurred their hostility through condescending racial and social attitudes. This does not condone recent communistic cruelties, but it does help to explain why communism has spread through countries which could have been our friends. Through decades of exploitation men were "sowing the wind" and we are now "reaping the whirlwind."

#### WILL THERE BE A FUTURE JUDGMENT?

Not only is every day a day of judgment but also there are special periods of judgment like the one through which we are now passing. And beyond this, I believe there is a future judgment of God. When we take judgment into our own

hands and attempt to right the wrongs of our world, we never do a perfect job. The individual or the nation that sets out to "put the fear of God" into "ungodly" foes nearly always plays false to the love of God. While Jesus hated sin but loved the sinners, we hate and kill the sinners and then keep the sin.

"'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."<sup>2</sup> It is not for us to set ourselves up to pronounce and execute final judgment. As Anne of Austria said to the scheming Richelieu, "God does not settle his accounts every day, my Lord Cardinal, but he settles them all at last." With her, I believe that God has a future great day of judgment.

When will that day come? Jesus' closest contemporaries believed it was about to come in their day. They lived as men for whom the time was short. They urged men to escape the awful fate awaiting them if they were unprepared for the great day of the Lord's wrath.

But years passed and the heavens did not open. The world's life went rolling on. Then men began to question the predictions of those who had been proclaiming the approaching Judgment Day. It was to answer these questioners that the Second Epistle of Peter declared: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."<sup>3</sup> The writer was thus admonishing his readers not to set dates for God. Men cannot read the Lord's calendar. They must be patient.

But now nineteen centuries have passed and still God has not come in cataclysmic fashion to wind up the business of the world. And while some are still preaching that the Great Day of Judgment is near, not many thoughtful persons are expecting the world to come to an end on a near tomorrow.

As a rule, when preachers seek to arouse us to the urgency of preparing for God's judgment, it is with the thought of

<sup>2</sup>Romans 12:19.

<sup>3</sup>Peter 3:8.

appearing before him at death rather than of his appearing before us in life. When we read Saint Paul's words, "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God,"<sup>4</sup> do we not think of an event in the next world? But when is that appearing to be? Immediately after death? Or do we enter into a long sleep from which we shall be awakened at the final judgment of the world?

Would we not give almost anything to know what will happen to us the first five minutes after death? Or would we? Maybe God meant the mystery of dying to be part of the adventure of living. To know completely what lies beyond the veil would be to discourage all wondering and seeking and thus to miss the joy of finding. How many of the joys of life are full of delight because there are ever new surprises! And it is better that the "bourn from which no traveler returns" is one that "eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard."

From my reading of the Scriptures, I believe that we shall be judged at death rather than go into a long sleep, awaiting a final day of reckoning. I recall that Jesus on the cross said to the penitent thief beside him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."<sup>5</sup> I remember also that when the cynical Sadducees were asking him about the resurrection, he answered: "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."<sup>6</sup> My interpretation of that reported statement is that Jesus believed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at that time were living somewhere in the realm of the spirit. Jesus seemed to treat death as just a stepping from the life visible to the life invisible.

Nevertheless, death is an immeasurably decisive step. Not only is it a step from which we cannot turn back but it

<sup>4</sup>Romans 14:10.

<sup>5</sup>Luke 23:43.

<sup>6</sup>Matthew 22:31-32.

means leaving the body, and when our spirits are set free from their bodily limitations, what will they be ready to do? That will be a test which judges us. In this world we depend so much on our food and comforts and cars. When we no longer have these, what will we depend on? That will be a test which judges us. In this life people are looked up to or looked down on according to their reputation, their property, or their social standing. When at death we are stripped of all these social distinctions and our secrets are revealed and we are seen for what we really are, that will be a test which judges us. The day of our dying will, in truth, be a judgment day for each of us.

#### HOW SHALL WE BE JUDGED?

We shall be judged by the law of growth. If life goes on growth must go on, for what is life without growth? Phillips Brooks, nineteenth-century prince of American preachers, graphically described his conception of the Last Judgment. He believed that we shall stand before the Great White Throne waiting for the Judge's lips to open. But his lips will not open. He will simply lift his hand and remove from each soul every restraint. Then, without one word of condemnation or approval, each soul will show its real nature and, impelled by its own inner tendency, will seek its own place. Those who have learned to like what Christ liked and have fitted themselves for his fellowship will go to the place he has prepared for them. Those who have lived for the flesh and by material things will go to the realm where moth and rust corrupt.

Also the New Testament makes clear that divine judgment operates by the law of love as well as by the law of growth. It is Christ, said Peter, who "is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead."<sup>7</sup> The character

<sup>7</sup>Acts 10:42.



of the judge gives confidence in the nature of his judgment.

Christ is pictured as the Great High Priest who has entered into the Holy of Holies with God the Father. With Christ at the right hand of God the divine judgment seat is portrayed as a "throne of grace," to which we can "with confidence draw near."<sup>8</sup>

The grace of God does not weaken his justice, but insures it. What is justice? The classic portrayal of justice is that of a blindfolded woman with scales in her hand, the implication being that the essence of justice is to weigh the facts in hand with an impartiality which might be destroyed by the sight of those presenting them. But our modern insights recognize that such blindfolded justice is scarcely adequate. In our courts of law we seek to know the backgrounds of those who stand before the bar. Two young fellows may have stolen the same amount of money. One is a product of the slum, where the street has been his playground and the gang has furnished his friendships. The other has forfeited the best of opportunities in home and school. Does not justice demand that a distinction be made in the blame and treatment given the two criminals?

Two boys are in the same class at school. One is a bland, easygoing fellow who takes everything in his stride. The other is a tense lad who ties himself in knots and takes everything the hard way. If the teacher is to be just to those two boys, she must take into account their differences of temperament. The rendering of justice requires insight into temperaments as well as backgrounds. It calls for imagination which can put ourselves into the places of others and see how life looks to those whose color and creed and nationality differ from ours.

Moreover, insight and imagination must be motivated by love if full justice is to be meted out. Common is the saying that love is blind. Sometimes it is. But more often love sees

<sup>8</sup>Hebrews 4:16.

farther than the law, and certainly farther than fear. A good mother discerns possibilities in a boy which the policeman misses, aye, which the lad himself may overlook.

If we human beings have come to recognize that justice involves insight, imagination, and sympathetic understanding, we certainly can assume that divine judgment will do no less. We can "with confidence draw near to the throne of grace," believing that we shall be judged by One who oversees everything and overlooks nothing, yet rules by law blended with love. We should not think of him as a Divine Detective who follows us around as Victor Hugo's Inspector Javert followed Jean Valjean. Rather he is like a parent who follows through with a wayward child. It is one thing to follow for the sake of enforcing the law; it is another thing to follow through for the sake of saving the person involved. And remember, "God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."<sup>9</sup>

We shall be judged by One who is firm, not condoning our faults, but also faithful, not forgetting our efforts. He is infinite in compassion and tender in mercy, One who understands the inmost ache of our hearts and the subtlest cause of our failures.

Does this mean that judgment will involve no punishment? Some years ago a man asked Dr. William E. Orchard of London, noted religious leader, whether he thought that hell might not be dismissed in these days of modern enlightenment. With a strange quietness and a disturbing smile, Dr. Orchard replied, "I shouldn't bank on it if I were you." Divine love is not soft and sentimental if it is to be just. The law of the harvest has not been repealed and "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."<sup>10</sup>

But on the other hand since God is a Father, his punishments must be for a redemptive purpose. When we read the

<sup>9</sup>John 3:17.

<sup>10</sup>Galatians 6:7.

New Testament reference to sinners being "thrown into the eternal fire," we should remember that the words "eternal fire"<sup>11</sup> literally mean "the fire of the age," and that to the Hebrews fire was not a means of torment but the agent of destruction or cleansing. There is little or no scriptural basis for the lurid portrayal of unending punishment. Such a picture of God degrades him from a Heavenly Father to a heartless tyrant.

Now let us ask ourselves this question: Are we less restrained by the judgment of love than by the judgment of law? If so, then let us beware, for we have not caught the Spirit of Christ. But if we are more afraid of hurting love than of being hurt by law, more concerned about the pain we are giving our Heavenly Father than about the punishment he may inflict on us, then we are in the proper mood for the Judgment Day. And we can say with certain first-century Christians: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him."<sup>12</sup>

#### HOW DOES CHRIST COME TO JUDGE?

"When he appears . . ." But was the author of those words thinking only of Christ's appearance before us when individually we stand at his judgment seat after death? Or is Christ to appear again on this earth?

The earliest Christian confessions did not say that Christ would one day return to judge the quick and the dead, but that he already reigns as Lord. For centuries, however, the Apostles' Creed has been carrying the assertion that "He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

And it is not surprising that in times as dark as the present many should feel that Christ must come soon. Multitudes believe that the Great Day of Judgment is near. Some are

<sup>11</sup>Matthew 18:8.

<sup>12</sup>1 John 3:2.

expecting Christ to appear out of the heavens in sudden and dramatic fashion. Some hold that he will set up his throne in Jerusalem and rule for a thousand years. The faithful who have died with Christ will rise and reign with him. An overwhelming majority of the living will be converted and enjoy a period of great prosperity and happiness. At the end of the thousand years, some premillennialists believe that there will be a short period of apostasy and this will be followed by the resurrection of the wicked and their final judgment and condemnation. Then there will be a final conflagration to wipe out the world and a new heaven and a new earth will appear. There are, of course, many variations in this general pattern of expectation.

Arguments about the form and time of Christ's future coming are as futile as they are heated. Sincerely good people hold divergent views, and only God knows which will prove to be right.

It is important, however, to issue a few words of warning lest in our expectation of Christ's second coming we fall into the mistakes made by his contemporaries at the time of his first coming. "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not."<sup>13</sup> Why?

Recall the gospel scenes. When Jesus came back to his home town of Nazareth, his neighbors marveled at his words but they failed to recognize him as the Christ. They said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?"<sup>14</sup> Jesus seemed too much one of them, too commonplace and near at hand to be the Messiah.

Thereupon Jesus left his home town to teach and heal throughout Galilee. His words and his works attracted excited attention. So popular and powerful did he become that he revived the Jewish national hope of a messianic deliverer. They offered him a crown, but Jesus refused it. He tried to teach his hearers that his kingdom was spiritual and not mili-

<sup>13</sup>John 1:11.

<sup>14</sup>Matthew 13:55.

tary or political. He said, "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you,"<sup>15</sup> but this did not satisfy his countrymen. And when he turned from the proffered crown to talk about the cross, their spirits were dampened and the crowds began to disappear. Thus the Palestinian public failed to recognize and receive Jesus as the Divine Deliverer because his principle of redemption was inner and spiritual while his countrymen were counting on a deliverance external and military.

And these are precisely the same errors which threaten to be repeated in the current expectations of Christ's coming. Like the Nazarene neighbors of Jesus, many are looking for the Christ to come in some spectacular fashion so they fail to recognize his coming in the commonplace. Watching for his dramatic descent from the clouds of heaven, they fail to see him in the close-up.

And, like the Galilean crowds who were looking for a king to free them by force, many in our day are expecting Christ to usher in his kingdom by some external dramatic demonstration of temporal power. They fail to understand that we do not usher in the Kingdom of Heaven by waiting for God or the government to prepare it for us. One trouble of our time is that too many people are waiting for the government to do things which they should do for themselves. Likewise too many are waiting for God to do things *for* them rather than *with* them. They forget that we are called to be "working together with him."<sup>16</sup>

As Jesus told his contemporaries, we must cease looking for signs and asking for dates. Ours is the duty of stressing and exploring Christ's way of coming through the inner spirit. What had Saint Paul experienced when he prayed "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith?"<sup>17</sup> How did the writer of Revelation expect us to respond when he interprets Christ as saying: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door,

<sup>15</sup>Luke 17:21.

<sup>16</sup>2 Corinthians 6:1.

<sup>17</sup>Ephesians 3:17.

I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me"?<sup>18</sup>

Christ is coming to his own even now, and to those who are wise enough to recognize him and willing to receive him, he gives the power to become children of God.

Yonder is a man who a few years ago was a problem to his family and a misery to himself. He had slipped into the clutches of alcoholism. His health and morale were fast going. But he finally admitted that he must trust to a Higher Power. Today he is in full control of himself, respected by his family, happy in helping others, a credit to his church. As I have watched this man's transformation, I have felt that I saw Christ coming through the channel of character.

Or I think of a father who lost a son in Japan during the late war. At first he was very bitter against the Japanese. But gradually he came to realize that Japanese boys, like his own son, had been helplessly caught in the war system. His bitterness gave way to charitableness and he contributed generously to the founding of the International Christian University in Japan. When we see charity replacing hate in the human heart—that is Christ coming.

Whenever we see the better angels of our nature driving out the evil spirits of our dispositions, whenever we see the shadows of despair giving way to sunny hopefulness—all these are evidences of Christ's coming.

#### IS THERE TO BE A DIVINE V-DAY?

Admitting that Christ can and does come through these inner channels of the spirit, nevertheless this fact does not exhaust the full Christian hope. The promise of the Christian faith is more than a Kingdom of Heaven within us plus a Kingdom of Heaven beyond the grave. The New Testament holds forth the hope of Christ's final victory by which

<sup>18</sup>Revelation 3:20.

history is consummated in the creation of a "new heaven and a new earth."

When this century opened, the American pulpit was very confident that man through science, education, and democracy was on the way to build the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. But after two world wars, all that easygoing optimism has vanished. Our best thinkers in the religious field are not trusting now to the cleverness and natural goodness of men. What hope then is left to the Christian? Can he be content merely with the prospect of his personal escape at death from a purposeless world? No, such an individualistic hope cannot satisfy a real man, for he is interested in the welfare of society. He craves meaning and purpose and growth in the things on which he works. He is concerned about history as well as himself. He wants to know whether human society is going somewhere and getting someplace.

The New Testament asserts that history does have meaning. The reversals of the twentieth century have caused us to repudiate the optimistic view that we are riding the escalator of inevitable progress, but they do not warrant our deleting from our Lord's Prayer the petition, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." We can still expect Christ's kingdom as the consummation of history, provided we see it as a divine gift, not a human attainment.

The decisive battle in a war may be fought long before the campaign ends. When the allied troops effected a landing on the French coast, it was the beginning of the end of World War II. V-E Day did not come for many months after D-Day, but the invasion of the continent decided the contest. Similarly Christ won the decisive battle with sin and death when he invaded human life in the Incarnation and "overcame the world" by his Atonement. He does not need to come in some more dynamic and spectacular fashion to

win it again. In fact, how could Christ come more beautifully than at Bethlehem or more powerfully than at Calvary? How can we improve on Paul's message: "we preach Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"?<sup>19</sup>

The campaign which began with Christ's invasion of the world nineteen centuries ago is to be continued by us in confident expectancy. We must not lose heart every time some kingdom enterprise seems to lose ground, and on the other hand we must not equate material progress with kingdom advance.

We should keep ever in mind Christ's words, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth."<sup>20</sup> If we are to worship him in the spirit, we are to expect him to work for us through the spirit. We human beings persistently make the mistake of trying to materialize the spiritual where God did not intend it. Some popular interpreters of prayer would have us believe that we can press our petitions somewhat like the levers of a slot machine. But we cannot put in a prayer to God on the level of the spirit and count confidently on pulling out its answer on the material level in the form of monetary returns and military victories.

Likewise in our expectations of Christ's coming, the trouble with too many popular interpretations is that they try to draw the infinite and the spiritual down to the pattern of the finite and the physical. The same insight which has led thoughtful Christians to abandon nineteenth-century liberalism's view of building the Kingdom of God on earth should logically lead us to avoid those current conceptions of Christ's second coming in dramatic demonstration of physical force and material change. If we were too materialistic in thinking we could build the Kingdom of Heaven by economic methods and governmental change, we are mak-

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23,24.

<sup>20</sup> John 4:24.



ing the same mistake when we expect God to realize his kingdom by material methods.

Yet, while Christ comes through spiritual channels he comes in great epochal dramatic movements. When, for example, the medieval church became parched with institutionalism, a Saint Francis of Assisi appeared and the flood-gates of the spirit were opened. When in the sixteenth century the springs of faith were clogged with clericalism, a Martin Luther came forth with his message of Christian liberty which revitalized the western world. When spiritual life in eighteenth-century England became so dismal that hope had almost died, a John Wesley appeared and the pulse of a whole people was quickened into life.

Thus history records great days of our Lord's coming. And there will be more until, in the fullness of time, he will usher in his final victory. We are not to ask for dates as did the impatient interviewers of Jesus. We are to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."<sup>21</sup>

The apostle who wrote those words had confidence both in history and his own future. He said, ". . . I know whom I have believed and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."<sup>22</sup>

Such is the Christian hope. Christ is not only the conqueror of death who said: ". . . I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."<sup>23</sup>

He is also the victor who said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."<sup>24</sup> In God's good time the victorious Christ will gather up the little deeds of our hands and the loose ends of history into a meaningful end.

Christ's D-Day has come. His V-Day is coming.

<sup>21</sup>1 Corinthians 15:58.

<sup>22</sup>2 Timothy 1:12.

<sup>23</sup>John 14:3.

<sup>24</sup>John 16:33.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

**If we believe Christ is coming again soon, will we work as hard to improve our present world?**

Not if we think of Christ's second coming as a cosmic physical event which will wind up the present world order. That is the danger of conceiving Christ's return in imminent and material terms. It was against this peril that Jesus warned when he told his hearers not to be asking for dates and looking for signs. In his parable of the virgins, the foolish ones were those who expected the bridegroom to come soon and failed to bring enough oil to await his delayed arrival.

We are to be ready for the Lord's coming but the best preparation is to be busy in the Lord's service. To count on Christ to come and change the world for us without our working for it is as deplorable a tendency as to depend on the government for services which we should first attempt ourselves. Suppose Christ were to come and set up "a new heaven and a new earth," how could its perfection be preserved unless we become new men?

**Should not the churches stress more the severity of God's judgments in order to curb the mounting lawlessness of men?**

Assuredly the pulpit should do all in its power to check the tragically prevalent lawlessness. But what causes the current lawbreaking? Is it lack of severe laws or laxity of enforcement? Our legislatures turn out laws by the tome and the prescribed penalties look pretty severe on paper. Yet all this does not restrain the criminal because he so often cherishes the belief that he can escape being caught or, as he says, "beat the rap" if

apprehended. It is not more and harsher laws that we need, but better and surer enforcement.

Similarly, in stressing God's judgments the pulpit should emphasize their sureness rather than their severity. Cleverness may find loopholes in the laws of men but not in the laws of God. An ancient hieroglyphic for God was the figure of an eye upon a scepter to denote that he sees and rules all things. The United States mint still prints the symbol of the eye on its dollar bills. Money may close the eyes of policemen but "he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."<sup>25</sup>

Yes, it is imperative that the church preach divine judgment to this loose-living generation, for "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked."<sup>26</sup> His mercy is infinite but his mandates are inescapable.

### How will God judge the person who takes his own life?

In presuming to answer this question we must try to project our insight and understanding up toward the infinite mercy and compassion of God, who said, ". . . I am he who searches mind and heart."<sup>27</sup> Since he is just, he takes into account the situation, the temperament, the temptations, the motives, the whole human equation. He knows whether the person took his life because he lacked the courage to face the consequences of his conduct, or because he had a misguided desire to spare someone else, or because he was so sick in mind that he was not himself at the time, or because he had been the victim of environmental and hereditary factors too strong for his character.

The line between sound and unsound states of mind is so subtle that we human beings should be loath to judge the suicide's degree of responsibility. Since the instinct of self-preservation is integral to a healthy mind, the person who takes his own life cannot be normal at the time. What thoughts were in his mind only God knows, and we should leave the pronouncement to him who "discernest my thoughts from afar."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Psalm 121:4.

<sup>26</sup>Galatians 6:7.

<sup>27</sup>Revelation 2:23.

<sup>28</sup>Psalm 139:2.

**If God is love, what does the Bible mean by "the fear of God"?**

The Scripture says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."<sup>29</sup> Certainly such a statement would not apply to the terror which causes a subject to tremble before a tyrant. Terror is not the beginning of wisdom, for it makes men lose their heads rather than use them.

Moffatt throws light with his translation, "The first thing in knowledge is reverence for the Eternal." Reverence is a quality essential not only to learning but to living. The man who does not reverently look up to something or someone higher than himself will let down to things lower than himself. When we consider the power and majesty of God, we stand in awe of him. When we go on to think of God's goodness and love, our attitude of awe rises into reverence. That feeling is the fear of the Lord in the proper sense.

We can understand why the Bible calls such reverence the "beginning of wisdom." Only the person who regards truth as sacred will take the pains to seek it and pursue it against all odds. Only he who reveres goodness will restrain himself enough to attain it.

There is a wholesome fear of the Lord which comports with the love of God. A bad boy has a craven fear that his father will punish him for what he has done; a good son has a wholesome fear that he will hurt his father by his own wrongdoing.

**If we appear before the Divine Judge at death, is his decision final?**

God is our Father as well as a Judge and we are to conceive of our relations with him in terms of the family rather than the courtroom. It is hard to think of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ closing the case of any one of his children with the finality of hopelessness.

If we believe in life after death, we are forced to believe in the possibility of growth, for life is never static. Death does

<sup>29</sup>Proverb 9:10.

not freeze us into fixity. There is no one of us so good that he should not hope and try to be better. And in our Heavenly Father's sight I wonder if there is any one of us so bad that he cannot hope and try to be better.

Worth pondering are the words of Studdert Kennedy, "The Day of Judgment is to me not so much an act in time as a process in eternity."

**In view of life's frequent failures and frustrations is it true that "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap"?**

We are often puzzled by the seeming exceptions to the rule that we reap what we sow. But we must remember that God's calendar is infinitely longer than ours and we cannot measure his harvests by our seasons. The farmer who works and prays for a good crop does not always get it, but if he faithfully and intelligently tills his soil praying for divine patience and resources, he eventually reaps a harvest of greater patience and resourcefulness. That is, he reaps more of what he sows mentally and spiritually, if not always materially. Thereby he becomes a better farmer.

The artist who puts his painstaking best into his canvas may not sell that particular picture profitably, but what he does acquire is more insight and skill in painting. In the long run, the artists and writers whose ability has been fertilized by early financial disappointment are likely to develop beyond those who were commercial successes from the first.

The person pouring out his loving service in behalf of another may not receive in return the love of the other, but he does develop more loveliness and a greater capacity for love in himself.

Thus on the level of the mind and spirit we do reap what we sow; if skill, more skill; if fortitude, more fortitude; if love, more love. And remember it is on the mental and spiritual level that we are told to put our dealings with God, for "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup>John 4:24.

Moreover, spiritual rewards do often work through indirectly to manifest themselves in the material realm. The prayers and work of a good farmer may seem to be frustrated by a killing frost, but by increasing his own resourcefulness they do in the long run improve his crops. The prayers of a patient may not always drive away the immediate disease, but the poise and peace of mind begotten by prayer exert a curative effect on the body "by the power at work within us able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think."<sup>81</sup> And while virtue is not always rewarded by material prosperity, nevertheless the personal moral qualities of good self-management do make for mastery over physical surroundings.

<sup>81</sup>Ephesians 3:20.

## *Belief in the Holy Spirit*

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### "I believe in the Holy Spirit"

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#### WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The story is told that Saint Augustine was once asked, "What was God doing before he created the world?" The old saint, a bit irritated by the persistent questioner, snapped back, "He was preparing a hell for inquisitive persons." The incident illustrates the fact that adequate answers cannot be given to many a query concerning the mystery of godliness.

But the question will not down. What *was* God doing before he made heaven and earth? God is the eternal Father, but what can fatherhood be before children come? God is love, but how could he love before there were created objects to be loved? What could be more unlovely than to love only himself? Did not Greek mythology picture Narcissus as receiving punishment because he fell in love with his own reflection? God is personal, but what can personality be in absolute solitariness?

The Doctrine of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, was developed from man's efforts to understand how the eternal, personal God lives and loves, transcendent over time and creation.

When we try to analyze personality, we recognize first that there is a central "I." Where to locate this center of

selfhood or how to define it, we do not fully know, but somewhere in each person is a motivating, thinking center. "I think, therefore I am."

And when I think, I have to think about some object. Thinking involves both subject and object. And the object of thought is described by a word.

Moreover, the thinker feels as well as thinks about the object of his thought. Any extension of the thinking self to an object involves emotion and, at times, the will.

Thus there is a continuous threefold activity in being a person: the self that thinks, the object of thought, and the relationship between the subject and object.

Now apply this analysis of personality to the Divine Person. When we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth," we are asserting our belief in God's central self, the motivating center, the thinking subject, the "I" of the Divine Personality.

And when the Fourth Gospel attempts to interpret the Incarnation, it says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."<sup>1</sup> Just as a human personality extends himself in thought to an object expressed by a word, so God extends his personality in thought by a Word. And that Word became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. In that sense Jesus Christ is coeternal with the Father. "He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."<sup>2</sup> And when we say: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord," we are declaring our faith in the extension of God's personality through his Word. Thus we understand the first two Persons of the Trinity.

And now not only does God, the thinking subject, extend himself in thought to the Word, but since God is a Father

<sup>1</sup>John 1:1, 14.

<sup>2</sup>John 1:2-3.



and the Word is a Son, there is an emotional relationship also. As we say in human circles, the Father's "heart goes out" to his Son. This energizing, motivating relationship is what Christians are trying to describe in the Third Person of the Trinity. And they use the term "Holy Spirit" because the word "spirit" in Greek means "breath." As the breath proceeds from a person's mouth and utters his thoughts in words, so the Scriptures interpret God's breath (Spirit) going forth to utter "the Word made flesh." Hence when we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we are asserting our faith in the outgoing activating will and feeling which relate the Father, as the subject, to the Son, as the object of his thought.

Perhaps a pause should be made here to clear up the confusion arising from the traditional words used in the Apostles' Creed. The terms "Holy Ghost" and "Holy Spirit" are equivalent, the only difference is that the words are derived from two separate families of language.

And when we speak of the three "Persons" of the Trinity, we should remember that the term derives from the Latin word "persona" which was widely used in the theater of classical Greece and Rome. "Persona" indicated the mask put on by actors in order to play different parts, and the word was taken over by the early theologians to express the diverse forms of God's activity without destroying the concept of his unity.

William James was wont to say that a man has as many social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinions he cares. A man is a somewhat different self in his business from what he is in his home, in his club from what he is in his church. And it may happen that in keeping up these external social fronts, there develops a basic division between his inner self and his outer selves. This multiplication of human selfhood suggests, but does not parallel, the threefold manifestation of God's selfhood. God never loses

his unity and integration, becoming a divided self. "The Lord our God is one Lord."<sup>3</sup> Nor are his differing manifestations due to his desire to please. They are conditioned by his own nature. In order to be a Person he must think and feel, and therefore he must embrace in himself a thinking self, the Father; an object of thought, the Son or Word; and the energizing relating self, the Holy Spirit. "God in three Persons, Blessed Trinity."

#### WHAT IS IT TO BE BORN OF THE SPIRIT?

Like all the deepest things of life, the Holy Spirit is better apprehended in action than in definition. One night Jesus sat in conversation with Nicodemus, a learned teacher who had come to seek the secret of his amazing power. In reply to his caller's question, "How can a man be born when he is old?" the Master replied, ". . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. . . . The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus' answer was a striking demonstration of his matchless power to illumine the sublime by use of the simple. The sound of the wind across the house tops was probably in their ears as they talked, and nothing could be more apt than the parallel between the action of the wind and that of the Holy Spirit. To the ancient Hebrew the wind was a mysterious force. Whence did it come? Whither did it go? It seemed to possess an aliveness. The wind picked up the fallen leaf and whirled it into motion. Little wonder that the ancients associated the wind with the life-giving Spirit of God. It seemed to them the breath of God. The Genesis

<sup>3</sup>Deuteronomy 6:4.

<sup>4</sup>John 3:4,5,6,8.

story of creation opens with the description: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters."<sup>5</sup>

And the Spirit or breath of God, which moved upon the waters in the creation of nature, also gave life to man. ". . . then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."<sup>6</sup>

The Spirit (breath of God) which gave life to man was available to renew life and power in man. So the Old Testament writers asserted. Inspired persons appeared who were moved by the Spirit. Prophets' voices reminded the people, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."<sup>7</sup> Other prophetic heralds quickened the hopes of the dispirited with the promise, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."<sup>8</sup> In the predictions of better times to come which so frequently are found in the Old Testament, two blessings were particularly emphasized. One was the anticipated coming of a new Leader or Messiah through whom the Spirit of God would operate freely and mightily. The other was the hope of a day when the whole community of God's people would be inspired and animated by the Spirit of God active in their midst.

The New Testament writers believed that the first of these hopes had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He was the Spirit-created God-man. Matthew and Luke report him as conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. While Mark and John, Peter and Paul do not mention the Virgin Birth, the point stressed by the whole New Testament

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 1:2.

<sup>6</sup>Genesis 2:7.

<sup>7</sup>Zechariah 4:6.

<sup>8</sup>Joel 2:28.

is that Jesus Christ was brought forth by the Holy Spirit as the life-giving breath or Spirit of God brings forth the Word of God. When we get this basic conviction and conception of the Holy Spirit's mission and work, our assurance of the deity of Christ is not disturbed by the heated discussions about the nature of his physical birth. The Spirit of God which "moved upon the face of the waters" in Creation and brought forth light also moved upon the darkness of human nature in the Incarnation and brought forth the "Word made flesh," our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Light of the World.

Not only was Jesus Christ brought forth by the Spirit, but he was also filled and sustained by the Spirit. The record is that his baptism was attended by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Luke goes on to say: "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness."<sup>9</sup> The struggle with temptation having been won in the wilderness, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee."<sup>10</sup> When he stood up to give his first recorded message in the synagogue at Nazareth, he felt as did the prophet Isaiah from whom he read that "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."<sup>11</sup> From the beginning to the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus moved in the power of the Holy Spirit and he bade his disciples count on the same divine aid for the very words they should speak when brought to trial.<sup>12</sup>

#### HOW WAS THE CHURCH BORN OF THE SPIRIT?

Yet with all the power of the Spirit manifest during his earthly ministry, Jesus promised an increase of the Spirit's presence after his own departure. He told his disciples,

<sup>9</sup>Luke 4:1.

<sup>10</sup>Luke 4:14.

<sup>11</sup>Luke 4:18.

<sup>12</sup>Matthew 10:19-30.

“ . . . it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”<sup>13</sup> And the Holy Spirit, or Counselor, would lead them into an understanding of himself which they had not yet caught.

At first that seems a bit enigmatic, but second thought reveals the principle involved. How often it happens that we catch the spirit, and comprehend the character, of a person better after he is gone from our sight than when he was with us. A boy romps around the house, sometimes getting on our nerves but not always getting into our understanding; and then, when his voice is stilled by death and his step is no longer heard on the stairs, that lad appears to us in the silent watches of the night and the light of comprehension breaks on our minds and we see the boy in a fullness never experienced before. Thornton Wilder interprets a departed little daughter crying: “Oh Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. . . . Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I’m dead. . . . But just for a moment, now we’re all together. Mama, just for a moment we’re happy. Let’s look at one another.”<sup>14</sup>

The disciples of Jesus had been so close to him, so immersed in their activities, so dazzled by his inexplicable works that they missed the deeper divine significance of his deeds. He had to leave them with many things unsaid because they were not ready to hear them and bear them, but the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of truth,” would come to lead them into all truth.<sup>15</sup>

Blinded by their tears, the disciples did not at first understand. But they obeyed his bidding to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would endue them with power from on high.<sup>16</sup> They stayed together in

<sup>13</sup>John 16:7.

<sup>14</sup>Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1938), Act III.

<sup>15</sup>John 16:12-13.

<sup>16</sup>Acts 1:8.

the hostile city. They nourished their spirits with memories of their comradeship with the Christ. In their hours of meditation they communed with their invisible Leader. They shared their experiences one with another. They waited in expectation of Christ's promised return. And most of all they were bringing their wills into surrender to their Lord's will when it should be revealed unto them.

And then at Pentecost when they were "all together in one place" the light broke on their minds. They began to comprehend what Christ's mission was all about. They felt the Spirit of the Christ whom they had so partially understood in the days of his flesh. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit,"<sup>17</sup> quickening their faculties, exalting their spirits, enduing them with power.

Not only had the fullness of time brought forth a Spirit-created and Spirit-filled Messiah but also a community of God's people inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The church was born as the Body of Christ in which all members share in the one life-giving breath of the Spirit. And only by the Holy Spirit can the Body of Christ live and grow.

#### HOW CAN WE MAKE CONTACT WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT?

"What is the wind?" a little lad asked his grandfather, a hardy old sailor. "I don't know, my boy," answered the grandfather, "but I can hoist a sail." When we ask, "Who is the Holy Spirit?" we can scarcely expect a satisfactory definition. Even Thomas Aquinas felt obliged to leave the matter in some such way as this: "The Trinity is a holy mystery." But when we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we are not content to stop with even a perfect definition. It is the force, and not the mere fact, with which we are

<sup>17</sup>Acts 2:4.

concerned. The true believer in the Holy Spirit is one who knows how to hoist the sail of his own spirit to catch the winds of God. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God."<sup>18</sup>

Let us approach the reception of the Holy Spirit from one of our simplest human experiences. We speak of "catching the spirit" of a person. John Buchan's experience of having the cold facts of the classroom catch fire under his great teacher Gilbert Murray has been duplicated times without number. Even dull minds are quickened by contact with some inspired teacher.

We know, too, what it is to catch the spirit of a school. A boy goes to college. The rules and traditions which he is asked to observe may seem to him rather meaningless. Many of the courses may strike him as quite pointless. But after a time the school organizations take him in. The confusion as to what it is all about begins to clear. He is caught up by the enthusiasms of the campus. As we say, "He enters into the spirit of things." And with that there comes a lift, a zest, a sense of belonging.

Similarly we catch the spirit of a church. The first contact with a church service may create boredom or mere curiosity. But when we take pains to inform ourselves as to the meaning of the symbolic acts and with patience wait for them to work their spell upon our spirits, the effect of religious worship is like that of the lifting power in the lock of a canal. A ship enters the lock. The sluice gate is closed behind it; the sluice gate is opened in front of it. The water flows under the vessel until it is lifted and sails off on a higher level. So in worship, we close the gates of our minds on secular things and open our mental gates to the contemplation of things invisible and eternal. Then the music, the symbolism, the liturgy, the message flow under our minds like the waters of life and we are lifted to a higher spiritual level. As we say, "We enter into the spirit of the service."

<sup>18</sup>Romans 8: 14.

We human beings are not little self-starting, self-contained creatures building ourselves by our own efforts. Our minds are not mere tools for digging up facts, nor are they mere repositories for remembered data. They are subtly sensitive instruments responsive to forces which play on them from outside themselves. And as George Eliot remarked, "Receptivity is a noble and massive virtue." We grow far more by being good receivers than by being go-getters.

We cannot with any success set out in our own strength to copy Christ. But the New Testament does not bid us copy Christ. Its injunction is: ". . . grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>19</sup> And growing is so much a matter of receiving. Read the New Testament and see how frequently the word "receive" occurs.

If we are to receive through the Holy Spirit the factors which make for growth in Christ we must put ourselves in contact with them. When Anatole France set out to write a book, he changed the decorations of his home, creating an atmosphere expressive of the period which was currently engaging his thoughts. When, for instance, he was writing *Thaïs*, he surrounded himself with the art of ancient Greece. For his work on Joan of Arc, he hung on his walls beautiful tapestries of fifteenth-century France.

Similarly, if we would receive the Spirit of God we must expose ourselves to the things which suggest him.

We open our minds to receive the Holy Spirit when we hang in the chambers of our imaginations pictures of Christ going about Palestine, curing the sick, healing the broken-hearted, carrying his cross, praying for the forgiveness of his crucifiers. For this reason religious worship, the Scriptures, and the sacraments remain means of grace by which our spirits keep fresh their contact with the Divine Spirit. When we abide in Christ's words and let his words abide in us, we

<sup>19</sup>2 Peter 3:18.



find that "into our hearts high yearnings come welling and surging in" from that "mystic ocean whose rim no foot hath trod." But we must go on from yearning to yielding.

#### HOW CAN WE FEEL HIS PRESENCE?

George Tyrrell, the mystic, was accustomed to say that our experiences can become the food of our souls, but to make them so we must lie down and ruminate on them, somewhat after the fashion of cows in the field. In our restless search for new scenes, new interests, new thrills, we are ever devouring new impressions, but we are not developing them into the nourishment of our spirits.

We need the Divine Shepherding which makes us to lie down in green pastures long enough to digest the meanings of our experiences; which leads us beside the still waters, for not in the rushing stream can we catch the reflection of ourselves against the heavens above; thus God restores our souls.<sup>20</sup> We must wait on the Lord if we are to catch the Holy Spirit and renew our strength.<sup>21</sup> One of the most needed and beautiful invocations is: "Deliver us when we draw nigh to thee from wandering of mind and coldness of heart that with steadfast thought and kindled affection we may worship thee in spirit and truth."

It takes time for spirit with spirit to meet. We can form quick fellowship on the physical level of our recreations and on the mental plane of our business and professional interests. But when disaster comes, men do not always find their best consolation in their clubmates and fellow golfers. When a heart is breaking in his own home, a doctor does not always go for counsel to the physicians with whom he likes to discuss a professional problem. In such hours the suffering heart is likely to seek out the comrades with whom he can sit down understandingly in a silence too deep for words.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Psalm 23.

<sup>21</sup>Isaiah 40:31.

Such comradeship is the result of long and deep cultivation.

There is a level of association on which "deep calleth unto deep," to use the Psalmist's words. And it is only at this deep level that the Divine Spirit can be received by the human spirit. On the plane of sense man cannot commune with his Maker. Nor does mere reason make God's presence real. And here is to be seen perhaps the basic reason for the lack of reality in contemporary conventional religion. A few years ago the minister of a large and prominent parish received through a questionnaire the information that ninety-two per cent of those who answered affirmed belief in God but less than fifty per cent said that they had ever felt his presence.

The church must bear a part of the blame for this lack of reality since it has been a far from perfect institution. The pulpit must assume its share of responsibility for it has often been a feeble interpreter. But must it not also be said in truth that perhaps a major reason is that men have filled their lives with superficialities until they have not the deeps to call back to the deeps of God? The deep experiences of religion can make no appeal to people living in the shallows.

After days of secularized living in the atmosphere of artificial and stepped-up amusements, an occasional church-goer cannot saunter into a service of worship and expect to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is reported that Holman Hunt, in painting the "Light of the World," spent the major part of three years trying to get the proper atmosphere for depicting Christ at the door. In his effort to portray the wintry light of Christ's lantern, Hunt worked often at night and out of doors, his feet wrapped in straw to keep them warm. If it took a great artist three years to catch the atmosphere of the Divine Presence, can we expect to saunter in from our artificial limelight and apprehend in a moment the "Light of the World"?

Our awareness of the Holy Spirit is not an uninterrupted

experience. Even the saints had their days of silence. We often have to endure today's fog in the memory of yesterday's luminous moment. The hours of assuring presence may be few and far between. James Russell Lowell's confession is by no means unique:

I that still pray at morning and at eve,  
Thrice in my life have truly prayed;  
Thrice stirred below my conscious self, have felt  
That perfect disenthralment which is God.

Yet had not Lowell "stood by" habitually, he would not have experienced those three deeply satisfying revelations of the Spirit.

#### HOW CAN WE HEAR HIS MESSAGE?

A recent letter from James Francis Cooke, former editor of *Etude*, reveals how we can and must go beyond stillness if we are to make way for the Holy Spirit. He wrote that he once asked Victor Herbert where he got so many of his melodies. The composer replied that many of them came in his dreams and he woke up singing and whistling them. Then Dr. Cooke told me how he himself had recently dreamed about a famous contemporary composer who was going around the musical circles of Florence bragging extravagantly of some new composition he had just finished. This boasting suggested to my correspondent in his dream, a poem. Awaking, he went to his study in the middle of the night and wrote it as it had come to him in the Italian language, which he called *The Moment of Triumph*.

The moment of triumph is always very dangerous,  
Because you believe that you have made  
Your book,  
Your picture,  
Your drama,

Your symphony,  
Your victory,  
Poor fool! Poor fool!  
Do you not realize that you are merely  
The glove on the hand of God?

Those lines, born in a dream, bear witness by their source and content that we are receivers rather than creators. And only as we humble ourselves to recognize the Power that plays upon us do we receive the strength which flows from Him. Some people are so full of material interests that they have no room for the spiritual. Some are so full of themselves that they give no entrance to the Holy Spirit. We have to put ourselves out to take God in.

God dwelleth with him that is of a humble and contrite heart. "He leads the humble in what is right."<sup>22</sup> Sometimes we can bring ourselves to this receptive humility by quiet meditation, which shows how really empty is the seeming fullness of our living. A glass one third full of water can be shaken around till it splashes over. Likewise our half-empty lives may be stirred by busyness until they splash over, but by holding still we discover how little real content they have.

Sometimes this deceiving fullness is drained off by drastic experiences. When, for instance, a son comes to us in the midnight of his soul and asks for that which will satisfy the hunger of his heart in some desperate need, then we discover how empty is our spirit's larder, how futile is all our rushing around for worldly gain.

God gets his chance with us sooner or later. When disaster or sorrow opens a yawning chasm beneath our feet, we, like Oscar Wilde, experience our "De Profundis." Out of the depths we cry for God's help. But to allow our power of communicating with the Holy Spirit to be unused until we are at or over the brink of disaster is as tragically foolish as

<sup>22</sup>Psalm 25:9.

to let the wireless of a ship remain silent until a wreck has occurred. We should learn to work with the Holy Spirit in humility and not wait to seek him in our humiliation.

And the meekness which makes way for the Holy Spirit should not be confused with the pale piety of resignation. To be sure, there are times when resignation to the inevitable is a mark of high heroism. But let us not think of the Holy Spirit as a gloomy Presence, an inescapable shadow to which we must be resigned. So many make that mistake. The moment they begin talking about God or his Spirit their voices take on a sepulchral tone. "Prepare to meet your God" was a favorite evangelistic slogan uttered in shivering accents designed to awaken fears of divine judgments and penalties. Quite differently the New Testament pictures the Divine Spirit at the door of life: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."<sup>23</sup> Of course, there are hours of divine judgment, but the Holy Spirit may also be thought of as coming not with a search warrant but as a supper guest.

Robert Louis Stevenson, talking about the garden of his soul and the various plants which grew there, said that one plant he did not wish there is called wintergreen, or resignation, otherwise known as the False Gratitude plant. And the gallant soul of "R.L.S." accepted the inevitable not with a wry gesture of resignation but with courageous, even gay, spirit which enabled him to write adventure stories for boys while pain wracked his body and hemorrhages paralyzed his arm.

When we discern the nature of the Holy Spirit, we open the door for his entrance with an air of expectancy. Resignation says: "It is God's will. It can't be helped." Expectancy exclaims: "It is God's will. He can help." And help he does.

<sup>23</sup>Revelation 3:20.

Observe the effect of the Spirit's entrance as described by William James. At twenty-eight James wrote a letter, not published until years later, which revealed him in a state of wretched mental health, with no congenial task in view and with no satisfying convictions to answer his disturbing doubts. This personal experience of his young manhood gives peculiar point to a passage in the great philosopher's Edinburgh lectures which runs: "There is a state of mind known to religious men, but to no others, in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to close our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God. . . . The time for tension in our soul is over, and that of happy relaxation, for calm deep breathing, or an eternal present with no discordant future to be anxious about, has arrived."

Thus Harvard's noted teacher testifies that the Divine Spirit does enter when humility opens the door.

#### HOW CAN WE RECEIVE HIS POWER?

The best things of life yield their finest fruits not to those who are trying to use them but to those who are willing to be used by them. Music, for example, gives some pleasure to the person who likes to play for his own entertainment and self-expression. But the satisfaction so received is thin beside the thrill felt by the artist who loses himself in the interpretation of a great master. He may become so inspired that he is veritably "swept off his feet."

Likewise in love, we can use a home and make it yield some very substantial benefits, such as shelter, comfort, security. But these are meager compared with the solid joys of a home wherein the members are moved by devotion to one another. A house is built to be used; a home is established to use us. And a home is far more than a house.

It is this paradoxical principle which Jesus was applying

when he said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me."<sup>24</sup> It is by giving ourselves to be used of him that we receive life's richest satisfactions. It is by yielding ourselves to God that we fulfill ourselves.

It was at this point that Nicodemus failed to catch the point made by Jesus in describing the work of the Holy Spirit. As a learned teacher, he recognized that Jesus had a divine power which he lacked and desired. But when the Master told him that he must be born anew of the Spirit and to that end he must yield himself as one does to the wind, Nicodemus was unwilling to go along. He was like an observation balloon moored to his own social position and self-interest. He wanted to learn Jesus' methods that he might use them in his own teaching but was not willing to yoke himself with Jesus in God's service.

Unnumbered of humanity's best have testified to their discovery of the Spirit's power after they have surrendered their wills to the divine will. Let George Matheson, the brilliant Scottish minister, speak for the host of the convinced. In his early twenties he came to the conclusion that he was an absolute atheist. But at the admonition of his friends he held on to the moral decencies and maintained his devotional habits. He tried to act as if God were, even though he could not be confident. And, by yielding his will to God and yoking his strength with Christ, he eventually came through to become one of the most effective ministers of his generation. In later years when blindness was settling upon him, his deep certainty was voiced in his familiar hymn:

O love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I owe,  
That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

<sup>24</sup>Matthew 11:29.

## HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT SERVE AS GUIDE?

In England's dark winter of 1940, the late King George VI sent a New Year's message to the British Commonwealth. He closed his greeting with these words: "I said to a man who stood at the gate of the years, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light and safer than a known way.'"

As we face the foggy and shadowy future, we ask for lights and maps. But what we need far more, and what God gives us through the Holy Spirit, is a guide.

Maps are too static for a world that is alive. When we think how our fluid world has changed since Pearl Harbor more than ten years ago, who would presume to draw a map of the world a decade hence? How foolish to think we can determine the future world order by merely fixing geographical boundaries! It is as if we tried to chart ocean travel by making a map of the waves.

John Rhind tells a story of the last war. A massive tank going full speed suddenly came to a dead stop. There was gas enough. No mechanical difficulties appeared. No barrier was in sight. What was wrong? The officer had the answer. He said, "We have come to the edge of our map."<sup>25</sup>

For this moving, living world we need more than maps. We need guides. And we consult many in the course of our lives—parents, teachers, friends. But there is one guide whom nineteen centuries of testing leave supreme. The integrity of his character and the purity of his motives stand unquestioned. Some people assert that Christ's ideals will not work in a world such as ours, but they admit the desirability

<sup>25</sup>Wallace C. Speers, *What on Earth Are You Doing?* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951).



of a world in which Christ's way would work. When we describe any person or thing as Christlike, we are paying the highest tribute in our power—a tribute in which many a devout Jew and many a devout Hindu would join.

But Christ is not a guide to whom we look back across the centuries. We feel him beside us, the eternal Contemporary. He said: "I will pray the Father and he will send you another Counselor to abide with you, even the Spirit of truth." Then he went on to say that this Counselor, the Holy Spirit of Truth, would bring to our remembrance the things he himself had said. This explains why Christ is a daily present guide as other historic figures fail to be.

A grandmother in New England recently asked, "Why do not young people read Emerson now as they did in my youth?" Emerson's advice is as sound as ever, but in our fast-moving age we feel that we have to turn around and look back at Emerson. He seems a voice out of the past and we are too hurried to stop and translate his wise words from their quiet setting into the tumult of our time. Not so with Christ. We can feel him beside us in Cleveland or Calcutta. He is our contemporary guide.

Or consider Lincoln. Often in these days when we are longing for national leadership, we hear men say, "If only Lincoln were alive." But even Lincoln seems dated by a day that is gone. We do not feel him beside us. We do not hold Communion services with Lincoln. Yet that is just what we do with Christ. His is the Living Presence we sense at the Communion altar.

The invasions of France in recent wars and the instability of her governments have very naturally turned the minds of patriotic Frenchmen back to the glories of Napoleon. But even the most patriotic Frenchman does not sing:

Napoleon, lover of my soul  
Let me to thy bosom fly.

Yet that is what we do sing about Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit he is the living Christ, our eternal comrade and guide.

In his farewell discourse, Jesus said to his disciples: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."<sup>26</sup> In our eagerness to know the future we wish it could be shown to us in advance. But it is well for us that we cannot see, for, like the early disciples, we probably could not now bear it if we saw all that is before us. Have we not had experiences which we probably would not have had the courage to face if we could have foreseen them? But by God's grace and mercy we have come through them. ". . . as your days, so shall your strength be."<sup>27</sup> God, through the Holy Spirit, has a way of giving strength to the faithful when the emergencies arise. He brings us into deep waters not to drown us but to cleanse us.

#### HOW DOES HE KEEP US ON THE GROWING EDGE OF LIFE?

We are born by degrees and we die by degrees. Consider some of the stages by which life comes to us.

When a little human form is brought into the world, we say that a child is born. But only a small part of the life which is in any one of us was begun on the day of our birth. Just a feeble current of energy pulsing through a few pounds of human flesh, enabling it to breathe and drink—such was life on that first day.

But observe the child at the age of six or thereabouts. The little mind is ushered into a world of letters and figures, a world which brings him into fellowship with the noble personalities of ancient times and faraway lands. When the educated person with his range of interests looks at the poor

<sup>26</sup>John 16:12-13.

<sup>27</sup>Deuteronomy 33:25.

yokel who can neither read nor write, he feels that such illiterate existence is hardly to be called living at all. Education gives a new birth to the mind.

Or take another stage in the child's growth. At ten the little girl is placed at the keyboard of a piano, where she begins to work her way into a world of melody and harmony, which up to that time had been completely unknown to her. Ask the genuine musician how much this experience adds to life. She is likely to reply: "Adds to life? Why music is my life." Art is another avenue to a new birth.

Look at still another stage in life's expansion. A young man meets a young woman. As each looks into the eyes of the other, they feel that all which has gone before in their careers is as nothing compared to what they mean to each other. Life ahead without the other looks to be not worth living. The ideal marriage is not merely a union to which children are born. It is a union in which husband and wife are reborn—reborn into a world of united interests, of shared joys, of vastly multiplied appreciations, of infinitely tender experiences.

When we realize that growing life is a succession of new births, we are better able to understand what Jesus meant by a new birth. Just as around the illiterate man there lies unopened the world of books, as around the unmusical person there lies undeveloped the world of melody, as around the lonely person there lies undiscovered the world of domestic happiness, so, said Jesus, around the natural man there lies unexplored the rich world of spiritual things, of widened sympathies, of deepened joys, of heavenly hopes. Into this new higher life of the spirit Christ called us to be reborn. To those who live on life's lower levels, Christ's command comes as it did to Nicodemus, "You must be born anew."<sup>28</sup>

To some these new births come with earthquake suddenness; but to others they come by the slower processes of

<sup>28</sup>John 3:7.

growth. Entrance into a new stage of life may be like the dawning of a new day. As Edmund Burke said, you cannot draw a definite line between day and night, although light and darkness are the exact opposites.

And we may also ask, "When does the dusk begin?" Just as our Lord's type of abundant life comes to us by degrees, so it may depart from us by degrees. We say of a person in the grip of some progressive disease that he is "dying by inches." But there are other forms of slow death besides that of gradual physical decay.

In the life of the spirit there are slow changes which need to be watched more than sudden shocks. To be sure, we do have some sins which are rash, breaking out like measles in a single night. But the so-called "seven deadly sins," suggest slow decay rather than sudden outbreak. Look at the list: pride, covetousness, lust, envy, anger, gluttony, and sloth. These are the sins which harden the arteries of the spirit and sap the energies of virtue.

Saint Paul wrote: ". . . The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."<sup>29</sup> Christ proved himself a quickening spirit. When he was here in the flesh, he put new vitality into palsied limbs, new sanity into weakened minds, new sensitivity into dulled nerves, new energy into drooping spirits. He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. And then he bequeathed the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving work. The Holy Spirit keeps us on the growing edge of life.

#### HOW MAY THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE OURS?

In a sweeping passage Saint Paul sums up the blessings brought through the Holy Spirit. He says: ". . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup>1 Corinthians 15:45.

<sup>30</sup>Galatians 5:22-23.

These are the virtues we crave, for in them is to be found the life worth living. But these boons are not begotten by mere moral effort nor are they manufactured by the crafts of men. They have to be grown by the grace of God.

What, for example, is the source of love? Love is an attraction too deep for conscious analysis, whereby the lover and beloved tend to perfect each other. Thus love is the outreach of the self toward completion. God created his children for love, and without it we are not really human. Love itself then is the gift of God. The Bible put it even more strongly. It says, “. . . God is love.”<sup>81</sup> Love is the Spirit of God in us.

Since love stems from God, it can only be kept fresh and growing by divine cultivation, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. Without him family love tends to deteriorate into fretful possessiveness, friendship is likely to wither into tiresome pettiness, and brotherly love turns brown with the frost of suspicion and all too often succumbs to the bitterness of hatred. And the only hope of loving our enemies lies in receiving the Spirit of our Heavenly Father who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good.”<sup>82</sup>

Or consider the second in Saint Paul’s list of the Holy Spirit’s gifts—*joy*.

The service of the Holy Spirit is that he helps us to distinguish pleasure from happiness and develop real joy. There are many experiences which give us temporary pleasure but do not add up to abiding satisfaction. Their thrills pass quickly, and sometimes leave a trail of regret and remorse. Some of our sense pleasures are like lightning flashes, while true joy is like the sunlight.

If we are to have the full joy of living, our native temperament, energized by the will and regulated by the conscience, must enlarge itself with many and wholesome interests. And we should learn what C. S. Lewis tells us in

<sup>81</sup>1 John 4:8.

<sup>82</sup>Matthew 5:45.

his "*Screwtape Letters*." He makes the Devil admit that when it comes to the real joys of living, God has the advantage. The solid satisfactions of life are in the godly regions of experience.

Why is this so? For one thing, the Spirit of God helps us to see more of interest in the simple common things around us. Also he leads us to cultivate the higher mental interests rather than the lower and the carnal. And the higher the level of our interests, the wider their range and variety.

Furthermore, the godly person enjoys without despoiling. He can draw delights from beautiful landscapes without keeping others from the same pleasure. He can revel in a great work of art without feeling that he must own it and take it home for his exclusive possession. Think how we could all multiply our joys of living if we conquered our possessive spirit and learned to appreciate more God's non-competitive values such as beauty, truth, and goodness.

And so we might go on with the other blessings listed as the "fruit of the Spirit." Take just one more—*peace*. So much is written about "peace of mind" because it is something we all seem to be seeking. But the dangerous trend of current discussion is that we are trying to secure peace of mind through adjustment to the world, which is ever changing, rather than to the things of God, which abide.

The Holy Spirit leads us to live with lasting things. Thereby we attain inner peace which can withstand the storms of circumstance, even death itself. On the last night of his earthly life, Jesus said to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."<sup>38</sup> Certainly it was not as the world gives, for the world does not give peace of mind in the shadow of the grave. If we have put our interest in worldly things, then death seems a dread invader tossing us into a dark unknown. But if we have cultivated a taste for the things that are

<sup>38</sup>John 14:27.

invisible and eternal and lived for the spirit rather than the body, then we gain the assurance of Saint Paul: ". . . I am sure that neither death, nor life . . . neither things present nor things to come . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>84</sup>

Not every driving purpose is permanent enough to give us lasting peace. Hence the Holy Spirit gives another factor, namely the peace that comes through *fulfillment*.

The world's way of seeking contentment is the childish one of trying to secure and contain all we can. As a lad my fondness for plum pudding led me to think that I could be blissfully happy if I could eat as much of it as I wanted. I tried it once and the result was not peace of mind! We greedy grown-up children still follow the false principle that peace comes through filling. Thereby the "have-nots" keep themselves in a hell of disappointment and the "haves" become "fed up" like the self-indulgent youth who confessed, "We took what we wanted until we no longer wanted what we took."

Through the Holy Spirit we learn that the peace of God comes not by trying to *fill* ourselves but by trying to *fulfill* ourselves. And since we are made in the image of God and God is a Spirit, we find the peace of fulfillment through giving ourselves to godly and spiritual things. We cannot be content on the animal level. As Saint Augustine said: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and we are restless till we find rest in thee."

<sup>84</sup>Romans 8:38,39.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

When I hear about the Trinity, I can understand God as Father and God as Son in Jesus Christ, but why is the Holy Spirit so vague and hard to grasp?

Yours is a very common difficulty and it is due to the nature of the Holy Spirit. We can think of God the Father as a Being "out there" somewhere, beyond us or above us. We can form a mental picture of the Son as a Person who lived in Palestine and now as the eternal Christ stands ever at our side. But the Holy Spirit works within us. We cannot objectify him. The concept of spirit eludes eyesight and mindsight.

We can make the Holy Spirit real to ourselves not by straining the reason to understand him but by opening the heart to receive him. Something begins to happen within us when with sincere desire and surrendered will we pray with Whittier:

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart,  
Wean it from earth; through all its pulses move.

There comes a freshening to our spirits as the dew gathers on the parched grass, and our minds cease their throbbing impatience as the pulse steadies when we "calm down." That is the Holy Spirit at work. He is as hard to see as is the source of the dew or the blood stream. But we can feel his presence and his power.

Can the Holy Spirit release powers in our minds which we cannot reach ourselves?

Yes. It is a well-recognized fact that there are reaches of the mind below the level of conscious thought. We are told that



our minds, like icebergs, reveal above the surface only about one seventh of themselves, which would seem a generous estimate of some minds we meet! This submerged region is the seat of feelings and affections, of dreams and drives, of mysterious reservoirs of memory and power.

Consider one aspect. In speaking of the Holy Spirit's work, Jesus said he will "bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."<sup>35</sup> This "bringing to remembrance" is a mysterious process. We try to recall something. The harder we try, the more futile seems our effort. We relax or we go to sleep. And then something happens to us. How? Something seems to flow into consciousness. Was it by association of ideas? Perhaps. But who associates the ideas? Who administers the invisible stimulant? Here, I believe, is the Holy Spirit at work. And this is only one of the varied services rendered by "him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think."<sup>36</sup>

Was the Holy Spirit at work in Old Testament times? If so, why does the New Testament speak of him as a gift sent after Christ's death?

The Spirit of God has been at work from the beginning. The Old Testament contains innumerable references to his presence and power. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son . . . so that we might receive adoption as sons."<sup>37</sup> The Holy Spirit appeared with special distinctness.

A new power came into the lives of Christ's followers after his death and resurrection. It was a sense of the living, loving presence of God, not just as God is present in nature's beauty and law's force and man's nobility. It was a presence so distinctive that men felt it to be new.

And at Pentecost when "they were all together in one place,"<sup>38</sup> filled with memories of their crucified Leader, fired with the expectancy of his return, fused with a deep sense

<sup>35</sup>John 14:26.

<sup>36</sup>Ephesians 3:20.

<sup>37</sup>Galatians 4:4.

<sup>38</sup>Acts 2:1.

of their togetherness in a common faith and cause, the Holy Spirit descended.

That outpouring of the Spirit was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. And that company at Pentecost became the Body of Christ, a body of many members but all breathing the same breath of God. Thus the church is a new creation in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

**When we do not like to do what we feel we ought to do, can the Holy Spirit help us?**

Yes, if we persevere. Is it not true that many of the best things in our lives did not seem good to us until we got our teeth into them and developed a taste for them? Cheap things often have a quick appeal, but good tastes and good taste take time to acquire. When we set out to study music, we have to force ourselves to do the finger exercises and the vocalizations. But after a while music gets us.

So with other good things. The Scripture says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."<sup>39</sup> Not at first. But if we keep on giving, we reach the point where the pleasure begins to appear. The Psalmist sings, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'"<sup>40</sup> Such gladness is not usually felt at first. The first invitation to worship may seem an irritation, and the exercise awkward and unnatural. But keep it up, and after a while worship becomes a deep satisfaction. "Getting religion," as men call it, is often heavy going at the start. But there comes a time when religion "gets us."

Merely setting the will in stern duty doing is, of course, not enough. The First Psalm in describing the godly man says of him, ". . . his delight is in the law of the Lord" (and then follows the secret) "and on his law he meditates day and night."<sup>41</sup>

The good man's delight in God's law was developed through meditation and adoration. The thoughts we hold in our minds eventually get into our hearts. Therefore, ". . . whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excel-

<sup>39</sup>Acts 20:35.

<sup>40</sup>Psalm 122:1.

<sup>41</sup>Psalm 1:2.

lence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”<sup>42</sup>

The imagination has a magic power and, when teamed with the will and guided by the Holy Spirit of God, can transform duties into desires.

**Why did Jesus refer to the Holy Spirit as the Comforter and then say that he will “convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment”?<sup>43</sup> Does he come to comfort or convict?**

We should remember that the word “comfort,” as used in the Bible, means to strengthen rather than to soothe, to put courage into men’s hearts rather than to lull them to rest. The word is “con-fort,” i.e. with strength. There is a difference between comforting and making comfortable, a distinction many of us miss when we seek a soothing religious faith.

The Revised Standard Version, however, translates the word “Comforter” as “Counselor.” This term connotes that the Holy Spirit serves as an attorney and adviser who expounds the weak, and also the strong, points in our case.

If we are thoughtful and honest, when we go to court we want a lawyer who does not try to fool us but who brings out the facts. When we are really ill, we desire a doctor who does not coddle us but tries to cure us, however severe he may be. When we are in deep spiritual or moral distress, we want a Counselor who goes to the roots of the matter and “convinces the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.” That is what the Holy Spirit does. That is why he is the true Comforter.

**Is there danger of relying so much on the Holy Spirit that we weaken our self-reliance?**

Yes, there are those who count on divine aid to do what they should do for themselves. We need ever to remember Poor Richard’s adage that “God helps them that help themselves.”

<sup>42</sup>Philippians 4:8.

<sup>43</sup>John 16:8.

When Jesus sent out his disciples to heal and teach he said, “. . . do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”<sup>44</sup> Even some ministers misread that promise and think it means that they can trust the Holy Spirit to fill their mouths with something to say when they enter the pulpit. The result is far from a success. The Master was making his promise of the Spirit's power to men who were doing their best and risking their all in his service, and not to lazy souls who look for higher help in lieu of their own efforts.

Recall how Jesus said on another occasion: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor.”<sup>45</sup> The doing of the commandments accompanies the coming of the Holy Spirit. We have to stretch ourselves to feel the resiliency of the Spirit. Whenever prayer is used as a work saver it is never a lifesaver.

### **When I pray I seem to be talking to myself. What is prayer more than autosuggestion?**

Often when we pray we feel that no one is listening. As we said earlier, James Russell Lowell confessed that, although he had prayed every morning and evening throughout his adult life, only three times had he felt “That perfect disenthralment which is God.” But those three experiences gave validity to his praying and were worth all the effort.

If what believers have called answers to prayer were only echoes coming back from an infinite emptiness, what has kept them resounding down the ages? Echoes die away, but prayers persist.

Granted that prayer does have in it an element of autosuggestion, granted that in part its power is generated by channeling the current of dominant desire through the millrace of the mind, nevertheless the deeper potency of prayer is felt as a force moving upon the seeker. To pray is to expose the shores of the mind to the incoming tide of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>44</sup>Matthew 10:19-20.

<sup>45</sup>John 14:15-16.

This incoming tide of the Spirit may be so still "that moving seems asleep, too full for sound or foam." But that stillness proves a source of new suggestions. True prayer is not merely the asking for what we want; it is the hearing of what we need. And when we open our minds and hearts to God, fresh glimpses of duty flash upon us, new needs call for help. Whence come these? Certainly not from mere autosuggestion, for some of them we not only never thought of but would like not to think of.

Also through prayer there comes a surge of power which cannot be explained as self-stimulation. To be sure, we can talk ourselves into a feeling of strength, but it was not by talking to himself that Jesus got the power to make his decision in Gethsemane and to endure his cross on Calvary. Books on the power of prayer are pouring from the press in increasing volume. Though at times we may think we are praying in a void, the overwhelming testimony of experience is that sincere prayers are heard by a "Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness."

## *Belief in the Church*

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"I believe in . . . the Holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints"

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### WHY DOES NOT THE CHURCH DIE OF HER DISEASES?

One virtue on which everyone likes to pride himself is sincerity. "I will not pretend to be what I am not." So says many a man in refusing to join the church. At first sound it seems a laudable attitude, for nowhere is sincerity more imperative than in the realm of religion. We feel instinctively that the church should be more honest than those who make their living in the market place.

To many, however, the church, of all places, is the one in which the shell of pretense seems so large and the kernel of reality so small. With all her prayers and ritual does she make her members any more upright and brotherly than those outside her pale? With all her buildings and budgets is she doing anything which challenges busy good people or stops busy bad people? A sophisticated young physician, himself the son of a minister, was recently boasting his emancipation from his childhood churchgoing compulsions. He said, "Nobody who has anything else to do goes to church."

When we hear critics of the church speaking in obituary

mood of her waning appeal, we might turn back to the "good old days" of our grandfathers when Sunday worship was supposed to be a confirmed American habit. Yet in the addresses delivered by distinguished churchmen in the 1880s, the doleful comments concerning the church sounded very similar to those of today.

Or turn back to Puritan New England. We expect to find the supremacy of the church unassailed. But the sermons of Cotton Mather deplore the fact that the course of pure religion "is exceeding decaying and expiring in this country."

Surely the thirteenth century in Europe must have been the time of ecclesiastical paradise. It was the great era of the cathedral builders. The labels of religion were as ever present in that day as are the commercial billboards which line the highways in ours. But one has only to read his Dante to discover how flagrant were the weaknesses of the church in the Middle Ages.

Not since the first century of the Christian era has the church been free from the charges of failure. Let us look then at Paul's picture of the newborn church as she lay like a mantle of fresh snow upon the landscape of the Near East! He voices his fear that in the church at Corinth he will find "quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder."<sup>1</sup> And no doubt he found those ills, for they were in the apostolic church. Controversy was acute. Bigotry was rife. Even the charge of favoritism toward men of wealth was made by James in his Epistle. Hence, when we hear our contemporaries decrying the deterioration of the church, we are reminded of what the editor of *Punch* replied to a critic who said that his magazine was not "as good as it used to be." The editor answered, "It never was!"

The Christian church has always been under fire and has always deserved to be. Saint Paul was speaking truth when he said, ". . . we have this treasure in earthen vessels."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>2 Corinthians 12:20.

<sup>2</sup>2 Corinthians 4:7.

Nevertheless, that early church, so earthen and so defective, succeeded in planting a new religious and social ideal in the soil of the Caesars. She kindled a new hope in the heart of humanity. She developed men who could live kind and moral lives in the midst of cruelty and vice. She produced persons who "outthought, outlived and outdied" the people around them.

And the medieval church with all her bigotry and persecutions was refining the brutish pagans, preserving the hard-won cultural gains of Greek and oriental antiquity, and laying the foundations of civil law.

No honest thinker can deny the shortcomings of America's colonial churches. Yet it was those little spires which kept the settlers from surrendering to the wildness of the wilderness. It was the pulpit voices which inspired the Founding Fathers of our nation and provided the principles for some of their fundamental declarations. To follow the story of New England one has to walk in the footsteps of her preachers. In Pennsylvania the formative influence was the Quakers; in Maryland it was the Roman Catholics; in Virginia, the Church of England; in the Carolinas, the Huguenots; and leading the advance across the Alleghenies were the Methodist "circuit riders," sharing the hardships of the pioneers, shuttling in and out of the new settlements, weaving the soft yet strong threads of the spirit into the coarse fabric of the rough frontier life.

The church, which in all ages has impressed multitudes with the signs of her decay, has possessed an undying vitality. This fact of itself should arrest our attention. What keeps the church going despite her disgraceful divisions, the mismanagement of her business, and the imperfections of her members? The very prevalence of her human weaknesses would seem to prove the divine source of her strength.



## HOW IS THE CHURCH "HOLY"?

The church is holy not because of the goodness of her members but because of the godliness of her begetting. She is the Body of Christ. "The church is a wonderful and sacred mystery, an all too human institution which hides a divine and supernatural life against which the gates of hell shall not prevail."<sup>3</sup>

The parish church is as old as our American civilization and as new as the modern chain store. Most of us have seen churches rise among us. A new residential section is developed. The residents desire a place of worship, especially a center for the religious education of their children. A building committee is appointed, a plot is selected, a structure is erected. Having seen how such churches are put up, we are prone to think of them as community creations, along with the public school, the library, and other neighborhood institutions. They seem pretty much the work of human hands. Many of them bear the names of generous donors.

Thus we tend to forget the divine source of the church. We observe Pentecost as her birthday and we need to remember that the persons assembled that day were more than a committee organized by a community. They were those on whom the Holy Spirit descended. Into their hearts was breathed the breath of life which was in Christ, and the church which arose at Pentecost is the Body of Christ.

If we would understand the origin of the church we must go back of Pentecost. Throughout the Old Testament there is the concept of a people chosen of God. The Hebrews looked back to Abraham as the one with whom God had made a covenant which would extend to his descendants.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Nathaniel Micklem, *What Is the Faith?* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1937), p. 219.

<sup>4</sup>Genesis 15:18; 17:7-8.

They were to be a holy nation. Over and over again the prophets censured Israel for breaking faith with her God-given covenant. Yet they looked forward to a coming act of redemption when his people would enjoy the full salvation of God.<sup>5</sup> The noblest spirits did not restrict this to Jews alone, but insisted that God had chosen Israel to be a light to the nations of the world.<sup>6</sup>

Viewed against this background, the church begun at Pentecost was a rebirth of the "old Israel of God," and Christ may be thought of as her redeemer rather than her founder.

When we speak of Christ as founding or redeeming the church, we must not think of him as a mere leader starting a new organization or reviving an old one. He is the head of the church; the church is the Body of Christ. This is not to be understood as just a figurative expression. According to the New Testament, Christ and the church are as integrated as the head and body of a person. One cannot be separated from the other. Christ is living in the church and gives life to the church. He made that clear in his own statement, "I am the vine, you are the branches."<sup>7</sup> A branch cannot live when cut off from the vine. And while a vine can go on living after it is pruned, it dies when so many of the branches have been cut away that it has no leaves to breathe the life-giving air. In this sense the church is as necessary to Christ as he is to the church. If we believe in "Jesus Christ, our Lord," it follows that we must believe in his "holy church," for the head and the body possess the same divine life.

#### WHAT IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

When we accept the biblical concept of the church as the Body of Christ, belief in the oneness of the Church inevitably

<sup>5</sup>Isaiah 2:2-4.

<sup>6</sup>Isaiah 45:22.

<sup>7</sup>John 15:5.

follows. "Is Christ divided?" asks Paul, with the implication of its absurdity. Christians agree that God wills the unity of the church, even though they cannot yet agree on the nature of the unity.

Of what do we think when we hear the word "church"? Perhaps the first thought which flashes into one's mind is that of a building or parish. We say, "I belong to the First Congregational Church on Main Street."

Or it may be that the word "church" makes us think of a denomination. "I am a Presbyterian," or "I am a Methodist."

Or our thought may turn to divisions larger than denominations, and we say "I am a Protestant," or "I am a Roman Catholic," or "I am a Greek Orthodox."

But when we repeat the Apostles' Creed, we say: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," and that takes us back to a concept of the church before there were distinctions between Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant. The members of all these communions repeat the Creed, asserting their belief in the "Holy Catholic Church," which term means the holy universal church.

When Saint Paul wrote to the little church at Ephesus, he besought the members to live together with all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another in love, remembering that there is one Body and one Spirit, even as they were called in one hope of their calling. Then he went on to specify the elements which they had in common: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all."<sup>8</sup>

Ponder each of these factors for just a moment. "One Lord." The first essential of the Christian church is the Lordship of Christ. As the familiar hymn puts it, "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord."

"One faith." Those first Christians had not formulated any long creed defining their beliefs, but they did have faith

<sup>8</sup>Ephesians 4:5.

in the saving power and work of Christ. Christ was to them more than the Leader whom they strove to follow; he was the Savior who followed them with his love. His saving power and work were symbolized in the sacrament of the Holy Communion. In that sacrament they saw the act of God the Father who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" to save them unto eternal life. In the bread and the wine they beheld the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ in his saving act. In the sacrament they felt communion with the living Christ and looked forward to the day, of which he said, "... when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."<sup>9</sup> Because the sacrament of the Holy Communion does sum up the central fact of the Christian faith, it has ever remained at the center of the church's life. Even the Quakers, whose spiritual perception feels no need of symbolism as aid, accept the truth symbolized by the Holy Communion.

Let us go on to the church's third common factor mentioned by Paul. "One baptism." From the beginning the church has practiced baptism as the sacrament of initiation into the fellowship of the spiritually born. "... truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>10</sup>

Here again we touch a primary and pervasive principle. As to the mode of baptism, Christians may, and do, differ, but this does not affect the deeper meaning of the sacrament.

As to the time of baptism, there are decided differences of conviction. Some hold that the rite should not be administered until the person has reached adult years and its efficacy depends on his volition and understanding. Others practice infant baptism, believing that it is an act of God's grace, not dependent on the individual's efforts but solely on God's love. They hold that infant baptism also acts as a

<sup>9</sup>Matthew 26:29.

<sup>10</sup>John 3:5-6.

lively conscience in the church, impressing on her the duty to take care of the baptized and to give them instruction as they come to years of understanding.

But these differences as to mode and date, deep as they are, do not disrupt the bedrock conviction that baptism signifies the cleansing of the spirit and initiation into the company of the spiritually born. In this deeper sense, all Christians share Paul's belief in "one baptism."

And now Paul's fourth factor common to the church, "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." When we repeat those words we catch a sense of the inclusiveness and catholicity of the church. We feel with the Apostle that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>11</sup> With our finite minds we should be loath to set visible limits to what Christ calls his church. When we recall his words, "And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold,"<sup>12</sup> we realize that the Body of Christ reaches far beyond visible denominations or divisions.

The true church, the Body of Christ, transcends visible ecclesiastical structures somewhat as a nation transcends a government. There is more to the American nation than there is to any government which may be in power at any particular time. Governments may change party labels through popular election, but the nation goes on.

The truth as revealed in Christ is too vast for any human group to claim a monopoly. And when I recall that the Fourth Gospel refers to Christ in these words, "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world,"<sup>13</sup> I am led to think of Christ's Spirit as so universal that rays of his light have been caught by persons far beyond the limits of organized Christianity.

When we thus define the Holy Catholic Church as a spiritual fellowship rather than an ecclesiastical structure, we

<sup>11</sup>Galatians 3:28.

<sup>12</sup>John 10:16.

<sup>13</sup>John 1:9.

must not think that church organizations are unnecessary. Organization is as necessary in the church as in the nation. We cannot make religion effective without visible churches. When I go to church and mingle with my fellow worshipers, my personal experience of God is heightened. If my child is to receive proper religious instruction, he needs a church school as well organized and efficiently run as is the school which he attends on weekdays. If our religious faith is to have any impact on civic and international life, we need not only strong local churches but also active federations and councils of churches. We can no more save the world with an individualistic, singlehanded religion than we can irrigate the Sahara desert with an atomizer!

And our efforts at organized togetherness must go far more deeply than the friendly gestures shown in church federations. When Paul exhorted the Ephesians to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,"<sup>14</sup> he was calling for more than a spirit of unity. A group of people may find themselves so congenial that they feel a spirit of unity. A family, on the other hand, may for the time being not be in congenial mood. Little John may be pulling Mary's hair or she may be kicking him under the table. Nevertheless, the members of the family are bound by bonds not of their own making. God made them a family. Theirs is a unity of the spirit deeper than any spirit of unity.

This is a distinction that the church must keep in mind. Her task, to be sure, is to foster the spirit of unity through councils and co-operation and many other means. But she must go further to keep "the unity of the Spirit," knowing that God made us one church and we are but trying to bring into visible reality what he has already begotten.

Sunlight shining through a prism is broken into different colors. Likewise the truth radiating from God strikes human minds in varied shades of experience. We cannot, therefore,

<sup>14</sup>Ephesians 4:3.

expect uniformity of doctrine and worship. "The true basis of unity is not a subjective but an objective one; Christ acting through the Word and the Sacraments. The church is not a closed society of specially qualified and 'pure' members. The church reaches as far as the power of Christ and his life-giving spirit is active in human souls. It is always a church in the making, and its boundaries are always being redefined."<sup>15</sup>

IN WHAT SENSE IS THE CHURCH THE COMMUNION  
OF SAINTS?

How can we believe in the church as the communion of saints when we see the many shortcomings of her members? And how could we honestly join the church since we are certainly no saints? We think of saints as persons of unworldly or heroic piety, memorialized in stained glass.

Yet those first-century Christians with all their imperfections were addressed by Paul as "saints." The Christian, according to New Testament teaching, is at the same time "justified" and a "sinner." The Old Testament called the chosen people of God "a holy people" in the very passages which denounced their sins. How can we apply the terms "holy" and "saints" to a company of sinful people?

The answer is that the holiness derives not from the saintliness of the members but from the divine activity in their midst, just as we speak of "holy matrimony" because the institution is of God and not because the contracting parties are consecrated and godly.

The church is not a society of the perfect but a fellowship of those who feel their sinfulness so deeply that they are seeking divine help. The members realize also how much worse they would be without the stimulus and support of fellow

<sup>15</sup>Bishop Gustaf Aulen, *Man's Disorder and God's Design* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 29.

seekers. The isolated human soul is like a fish out of water. There is no such being as a solitary Christian. All the specifically Christian virtues are social virtues. A tiny three-year-old refers to her Sunday school as "Sunny school." And one impartial grandfather believes that her presence helps to make it a sunny school! When the light of godly things is reflected from the pure minds of innocent little children or from the penitent minds of impure adults, it becomes the sunlight of the soul.

We believe, too, that this fellowship in the faith is not limited to the earthly sphere. The generations are linked together in a sort of relay race. Our fathers come down the course to pass on their unfulfilled hopes to us. For a time we race beside them until their pace slackens and they leave the track. They, "though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised" because "God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."<sup>16</sup>

Then we carry on until we hand over our unfinished tasks and unrealized dreams to those who come after us. And we believe that those who have finished their course in faith and do now rest from their labors are not completely severed from our fellowship. Not only do they live in our memories, but we also live in theirs. And seeing that "we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."<sup>17</sup>

#### WHAT IS THE WORTH OF CHURCH WORSHIP?

A Scotch dominie was one day calling on a parishioner who had been long absent from the services of worship. They were sitting before a grate fire. Suddenly the minister lifted a flaming coal from the grate and laid it on the hearth.

<sup>16</sup>Hebrews 11:39-40.

<sup>17</sup>Hebrews 12:1.



Together they watched it cool down from its leaping flame to a sullen redness and then to an ashen grayness. The point was caught. Fellowship in worship kindles zeal as "the sight of lovers feedeth those in love."

As the late Evelyn Underhill said, in the long run we come closer to God through common worship than through closet worship. We may be inclined to challenge such assertion, for some of our deepest spiritual experiences have been in secret. But the worship of the church is needed to steady and sustain our private devotions.

We are subject to fluctuations of mood. There come hours of exultant faith wherein we feel convinced of the goodness of God and of our fellow men. There come moments of mystic insight when the atmosphere clears and the very foothills of heaven are visible. But we also have low moods when we dwell in the basements of our natures and take ignoble views of our environment. We have spells of cynicism when we discount the motives of even our friends and lose interest in good causes.

In the handling of these changing moods, the individual needs the help of the group. It is quite true that a person can pray, read his Bible, and conduct his devotions in private, but the testimony of experience is that nonchurchgoers are not very faithful in keeping up these practices. They yield to the moods when they "do not feel like it," and to the hours when they "do not have the time."

The church through her worship not only helps us to sustain our spirits but also to possess our souls. Secular living often leaves us with a spent feeling. As we say, "It takes it out of us." It dissipates our energies. One of our needs is to keep pulling ourselves together. In our jobs we sit for five or six days a week like an oriental weaver behind his loom busily fingering the threads of an intricate pattern. Every seventh day the church in her worship calls us around in front of the loom to look at the pattern on which we have been work-

ing. She bids us compare the design of our days with the pattern shown us in the Mount of Sinai and the Mount of the Beatitudes. Thereupon we feel impelled to cut some threads and to pull others more tightly, and most of all we renew the picture of the whole plan. The symbols, the songs, the ritual, and the messages of worship help us to repossess ourselves of the certitudes which were ours in the fleeting moments of flashing insights and to reillumine the common day by the meditative recovery of the celestial light.

In this age of specialization, as Alfred Noyes has said, we are misled by small clever minds. Competition compels us to specialize. Thus we learn to know "our own lines." But we persistently fail to see how our lines fit into the full pattern of our own lives or of society. More than ever before we need to see life steadily and see it whole. The church through her worship lifts us out of our littleness, confronts us with the goals of godly living, and helps us to live with lasting things.

When we lift our eyes to the long perspectives, we lengthen both our memories and our hopes. We are delivered from the tense anxiety which asks, "What is the world coming to?" and we are strengthened with the thought of "what has come to the world."

#### IF THE SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE?

A middle-aged doctor said to his minister: "Why should I go to church? I learned the Bible stories and the Ten Commandments when I was a boy. What is the use of hearing them over again?"

If all that a local church does is to teach the same old stories and commandments in the same old way, the doctor is right. But however stodgy and static some local parishes may be, the church at large has realized that there must be progress in the practice of religion as in the practice of medicine. The physician would be a poor member of his pro-

fession if he had not kept up with clinics and medical journals since his graduation. Likewise, the person at forty is a poor Christian if he is still living by the ethical and spiritual insights which he had at fourteen.

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth;

They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth.<sup>18</sup>

Every schoolboy, for instance, knows it is wrong to pick a pocket or break into a house. But in our long-range complex living, stealing is not so simple. We can steal from people we cannot see and in ways so subtle and seemingly respectable that our consciences are not pricked. We must teach the implications of honesty for Wall Street as well as for Main Street, for the labor union and the directors' room as well as for the man-to-man transactions of the village store.

As children we were taught the commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." It meant to us that we should not tell a lie. Everybody hates to be called a liar. But think how many persons are such thin-skinned supersensitive egoists that we always have to keep skirting the truth in order not to hurt their feelings. Consider the possibilities and prevalence of "bearing false witness" in modern advertising, in professional propaganda, in diplomacy.

And so with the other old moral commandments. We assume that we learned them in our youth. But they need ever to be brought down to date. Their implications must be advanced to the frontiers of our new social sins.

On my own mental landscape at least three new sins have come into prominence since my youth. In my boyhood community, I was never made aware of the sin of race prejudice. And although I heard some high-school orations on peace,

<sup>18</sup>James Russell Lowell, *The Present Crisis*, Stanza XVIII.

I was never taught that war is a social sin. And as for the sin of totalitarianism, the subject never was mentioned in my Middle West rural community or possibly anywhere else in America forty years ago. Yet now these are the three sins most discussed in the American pulpit.

To keep the sensitivity of our consciences apace with the subtlety of our sins, to translate good intentions into intelligent goodness, to cultivate the taste until duty becomes desire—these are services rendered by the church. Jesus has been characterized as a mighty moral huntsman sweeping across the landscape of history, digging men out of the little burrows of respectability in which they had ensconced themselves. The living Christ calls his church to something more dynamic than mere decency, something more redemptive than mere respectability.

Just to be good enough to get by the law is not good enough. We need men of distinctive goodness who rise above the laws, men who refrain from doing not only what is illegal but also what is improper. We have many moral acrobats who can walk the taut line of the Ten Commandments without actually falling off. But we need more moral athletes who carry their virtues with such easy grace that they make goodness attractive to others and have surplus energy to help their weaker brothers.

And this creative goodness can only be developed through spiritual fellowship. Unless we cultivate the company of the godly we shall become earthy with the ungodly. A Wichita banker, Charles J. Chandler, tells of a little group of business and professional men who meet at seven-thirty in the morning of the first day of each month for half an hour. They come together for ten minutes of silence, then ten minutes of devotional reading by some member of the group. At times one or another of the group may then express a thought that moves him, but more often they close with ten minutes of silence. And the banker adds: "Throughout the days that

follow, one finds himself silently carrying in his heart his companions of those few minutes of spiritual fellowship."<sup>19</sup> Such groups illustrate the counsel given by George Fox, the Quakers' founder, that men should "know one another in that which is eternal."

Jesus likened his church to "the salt of the earth."<sup>20</sup> Her members are called to be the savoring and saving element in society. Like the salt, they must mix in life's earthy elements, even at the risk of soiling themselves. But they must be sufficiently distinctive and creative to redeem the company they keep lest they be ruined by the company they keep. They must be filled with such moral courage and insight that they become part of the solution and not more of the problem. When a member of a group shows that his behavior is being determined by Christ rather than by the crowd, he becomes a creative force.

There is a contagion of goodness just as truly as there is a contagion of evil. ". . . but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"<sup>21</sup>

#### WHO MOTHERS FREE MEN?

Jesus was born in a satellite country. Palestine was a Roman province and the poor nationals were cowed by the legions of Caesar. Moreover the noble Hebrew faith had fallen into the hands of a temple hierarchy which heavily taxed the devout worshipers and oppressed them with ecclesiastical red tape.

Jesus came to tell his burdened and browbeaten countrymen that God is a Heavenly Father and not a dictator like the Roman Emperor. He told them also that "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."<sup>22</sup> Hence they could go to God directly without the

<sup>19</sup>Speers, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup>Matthew 5: 13.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>John 4: 24.

intervention of any government or priest. As children of God they could turn to him as the Prodigal Son arose and returned to his father. In the parable the repentant son said, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'"<sup>23</sup> But when the lad reached his parent, the father did not say: "Young man, you have wasted your patrimony. I shall therefore take you back as a hired servant, and when you have earned what you lost I shall reinstate you as my son." No, the record is that the father threw his arms around the boy and cried, ". . . this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." The son was not compelled to justify himself by his works. He was justified by faith—the father's faith in him and his faith in the father.

Thus Jesus planted in his countrymen a new sense of worth and dignity. This was the seed of liberty, whose harvest has been the inalienable rights which have made life worth more along the Thames, the Mississippi, and the St. Lawrence than along the Ganges, the Yangtze, and now along the Volga.

Christ imparted a concern for childhood which has lowered the rate of infant mortality and lightened the yoke of child labor. By his treatment of woman, Christ gave womanhood a new status and imparted a spirit which is progressively securing for woman her rights. His love so overleaped racial and class boundaries that his leading interpreter declared that Jew and Greek, slave and free, are all one in Christ Jesus.

Christ gave so much care to the bodies of men that he has been called the Great Physician. He did not receive that loving title because he healed more individual cases than any other physician in the world but because he inspired a pas-

<sup>23</sup>Luke 15:18-19.

sion for healing which has sent the medical profession out to the needy, raised hospitals in our cities, and sped missionary doctors round the globe.

Moreover, Christ merits the title of the Great Physician because he not only gave health to the body but gave a healthy attitude toward the body. The words "health" and "wholeness" come from the same root. And what Christ did was to give men a proper attitude toward the body that they might treat it as part of life's wholeness. He helps men to "keep the body under" as a servant of the spirit.

Christ came also to make men free in mind. He said, ". . . you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."<sup>24</sup> Truth sets us free from foolish fears and blinding prejudice. Through Christ we develop the maturity which delivers us from childishness and elemental impulse. He helps us to cut the tether of self-centeredness and follow facts objectively, lead where they will, cost what it may. He counsels, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."<sup>25</sup> He places no barriers on the road to truth, but quickens the pursuits of the scientists and inspires the pioneers. It is no accident that Christian lands have produced the Magna Charta, the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the largest laboratories.

Alas, the church has not lived up to the apostolic injunction, ". . . stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."<sup>26</sup> She has too tragically often pilloried her prophets and persecuted her liberators. Sections of the church have advocated tolerance when they were in the minority and then denied it when they were in the majority. The church has been guilty of fostering superstitions and spreading fears.

Nevertheless the Holy Catholic Church remains the mother of free minds. Her liberty-giving spirit has not been

<sup>24</sup>John 8:32.

<sup>25</sup>Matthew 7:7.

<sup>26</sup>Galatians 5:1.

stified by the stupidity, the stubbornness, and the timidity of ecclesiastical governments. She still gives birth to prophets who defy dictators, to pioneers who chart new paths of social progress, to healing and helping arts which break the bondage of disease and sin. Liberals outside of the church may sometimes dash ahead with a speed that makes the church seem slow and stodgy, but when they have grown tired and dropped out, ". . . they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength . . . they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."<sup>27</sup>

When Nazism spread its killing frost over the freedoms of Germany, the universities and the press resisted for a time, but it was the church which proved the last stronghold of liberty. And today the church is freedom's best bulwark against communism.

#### IS THE CHURCH THROUGH?

A few years ago a writer offered a fresh and arresting answer to the threadbare question: "Why do people not go to church?" After interviewing persons in all parts of the country, he said that the situation simmers down to this: "The church is not attended today because it has nothing to offer which cannot be found in better form elsewhere." He admitted that the church has rendered useful services in the past, but now other agencies have taken over her work and the institution can be dismissed as outworn and outgrown. In short, the church is out of a job.

The first task which he said once belonged to the church and now has been taken away is that of charity. In an earlier day the church looked after the poor, but this relief is now being widely dispensed through secular social agencies and governmental organizations. In reply it may well be asked, however, whether these successors of the church are beget-

<sup>27</sup>Isaiah 40:31.



ting the brotherhood we need. Millions given to community chests by persons who know and care little about the recipients but wish only to stand well with their fellow givers, billions given grudgingly through government taxes and bureaus—such sums standing alone will not solve the poverty problem either at home or abroad. Such depersonalized giving may only serve to harden the givers and soften the receivers. "The gift without the giver is bare."

One thing government bureaus and professional agencies do not dispense is charitableness, and that is the saving element needed by our modern mass giving. The milk of human kindness is the element without which the machinery of organized charity runs dry. To preserve this there must be cultivation of the spirit and the imagination. When men catch the mind of God, they do not think of charity as a stream flowing from a higher to a lower level but as a tide moving across the bosom of the ocean, drawn by the attraction of a power above. Moreover, when men sit week after week in the worship of God the Father of all men, their imaginations become more sensitive, more like unto the Christ who so put himself into the place of the poor that he could say, ". . . as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore the church is imperatively needed to give range as well as charitableness to our charity and relief. True religion keeps pushing out the horizon of normal neighborliness with the disturbing question, "Who is my neighbor?" Such was the spirit which has belted the globe with missionary schools and hospitals. Unless this genuine missionary spirit of service is maintained and enlarged, we shall succumb to the narrow nationalism and class consciousness now so rife. The end of that blind alley is ruin.

The second task of the church which, according to the critic, has been taken over by secular agencies is that of heal-

<sup>28</sup>Matthew 25:40.

ing. He admits that the church was once the fountain of healing but it has been replaced as physician by the science of medicine.

Here it is a fair question to ask whether hospitals could extend their free clinics and enlarge their public services without the financial help of the persons whose generous impulses are cultivated by the church. Judged by the appeals which come to a minister's desk, it would seem that the mainsprings of philanthropy still flow from somewhere near the altars of worship.

And there is a respect other than financial in which medicine depends on religious aid. Responsible leaders in the medical field are increasingly ready to admit that their work needs those mental helps which come from religion, just as intelligent ministers are realizing how frequently they need the counsel and co-operation of competent physicians. One of the most significant trends of the time is the enlarged teamwork between medicine and religion.

The third function of which the church can now be relieved, so it is claimed, is that of changing characters and converting souls. In this work of making bad men good, the church "is being replaced by gland specialists, dietitians, psychiatrists, and psychologists, who hold that crime and abnormality are the result of disordered glands, improper nourishment, disease, poverty, ignorance, and mental derangement of one form or another."

It would admittedly be hard to overestimate the amount of crime and abnormality which can be cured by the above-mentioned procedures. Every minister has in his parish many persons whose situations call for the aid of psychologists and social workers. Salvation is a salvage of the whole personality for this world as well as the next. Souls cannot be saved in a vacuum, and environment enters into the process of redemption.

Nevertheless one thinks of cases which puzzle him as to

their cure by these psychological and dietary methods. Yonder, for instance, is a landlord who lives on the avenue of affluence but persists in squeezing his tenants into unwholesome tenements. Just what treatment should be accorded him? Is his trouble disordered glands or disease? Hardly, for he employs a bevy of doctors to keep him in health, and surely some of them would operate if there were the slightest excuse! Is he improperly nourished? No, for he dines at the best clubs. Is poverty the cause of his injustice? He has more money than he needs. Is it ignorance? Well, he has a college degree, whatever that may mean. Is it mental derangement? He is considered very clever in business circles. No, that man's trouble is a bit hard to reach by these new instruments of psychology and sociology. Nor do rent controls and housing laws change character.

And one thinks of other cases in which injurious actions can hardly be attributed to poverty, ignorance, diet, or disease. Just how are we going to cure such well-fed, well-housed, healthy-bodied, respectable sinners? When the Master was upon the earth, he gave his major efforts to the unsocial mental sins of the respectable, such as pride, narrow-mindedness, uncharitableness, and their like. He realized that such sins are so subtle that they can be carried for years without the possessors' being aware of them and thus "the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God"<sup>29</sup> before these genteel sinners. Jesus knew too that one proud, selfish, respectable person in a place of power can do more damage than a dozen drunken derelicts.

But take even the wayward minor or flagrant criminal. Admit that unwholesome environment, bad heredity, and improper diet have been enormous factors in perverting the personality. Nevertheless, when we find a person who gives these as the complete alibi for his wrongdoing, we have a case that does not offer much hope of cure. To change a life

<sup>29</sup>Matthew 21:31.

there must be some recognition of the person's responsibility for changing himself. There must be some sense of shame, some spirit of repentance.

With profound gratitude to the psychologists for the new insights and techniques which they have given us, we are not yet convinced that we have outwitted sin by changing its name to "complex" or that we have discarded our devilishness by treating our glands.

Making full allowance for the external conditioning forces which shape behavior, there are certain inner initiating factors which cannot be ignored. Call them by their old-fashioned names of "conscience," "spirit," "soul," "will," or change the labels if you like. They remain as realities. And it is to these that the churches address themselves, thereby rendering a service for which no substitute has yet been devised.

The Fourth Gospel hailed Christ as the Light of the World. For nineteen centuries the Holy Spirit has been radiating through the church, the Body of Christ, until many segments of society have become luminous with the love of Christ. He has inspired charity and healing, the reformation and education of character, and has imparted a general glow which we call Christian culture. But as in a room illuminated by indirect lighting we do not see the lamps, so in our world we enjoy the light reflected from Christ without seeing the source from which it comes. We forget that through the church the Christ current has come. To close the churches would be to cut the circuit and cast the world into a Christless darkness wherein hospitals, schools, charities, and social agencies in general would deteriorate within two decades.

The prospective property buyer or home builder avoids a community which has no church. Who then would want to live in a world without the church? That, however, is an idle question, for while individual churches may close here and

there, the Holy Catholic Church, the Body of Christ, will not perish from the earth. It is founded on a rock and "the powers of death shall not prevail against it."<sup>30</sup>

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

**I would like to know if the communion of saints can include sinners.**

The New Testament applies the term "saint" to groups whose members were far from perfect. Saint Paul addresses his First Letter to the Corinthians "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."<sup>31</sup> Then he proceeds to chide them, saying: ". . . it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren."<sup>32</sup>

In the church of the first century as of the twentieth there were sinners. Only one sinless Person has yet been recognized on this planet. The better a man is, the more conscious he is of his shortcomings. People should join the church not because they feel themselves good enough but because they crave God's pardon and Christ's power to become better.

**Many Protestant churches are named for saints. Are there any Protestant saints?**

The saints whose names are borne by Protestant churches are, with very few exceptions, Biblical characters belonging to the universal church. To such figures the adjectives, Protestant and Roman, do not apply.

If we use the word "saint" as Saint Paul often used it, as for

<sup>30</sup>Matthew 16:18.

<sup>31</sup>1 Corinthians 1:2.

<sup>32</sup>1 Corinthians 1:11.

instance in his letter "To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus,"<sup>88</sup> then there are numberless Protestants who deserve the title. But Protestantism, unlike Roman Catholicism, does not officially designate individuals as saints through the process of canonization.

### **Why have so many sinners become saints?**

An acute sense of sin is the first step toward sainthood. To save men from their sins was the primary purpose of Christ's coming, and the grace of God has proved able to redeem them.

If the question refers to the fact that some of the greatest saints had previously been very flagrant sinners, as for example Saint Augustine, we may say that their conversion demonstrates how God can redirect the force of inner drives from destructive to constructive ends. Those in whom temptation is strongest may often prove the ones in whom virtue is most powerful. It would be folly, however, to conclude that a person must see and do the worst in order to fit himself to do his best.

### **When a Protestant minister participates in the dedication of a Jewish synagogue is it a religious or a civil ceremony?**

I have never heard of a Protestant clergyman officially dedicating a Jewish synagogue, although Protestant ministers do frequently speak as a fraternal gesture in connection with Jewish dedicatory observances. In such cases, I should most certainly call it a religious ceremony.

Christians should ever be mindful of their Hebrew religious heritage. The gospels record that our Lord himself read the Scriptures in the synagogue. Holding so many religious fundamentals in common, Christians and Jews should take advantage of every occasion to present a common front against current evils. As the late Rabbi Stephen Wise said, if Christians wish to win Jews to their faith the best way is to be better Christians.

<sup>88</sup>Ephesians 1:1.

### **Do you think the Protestant Church left or right?**

Since the Protestant Church is being attacked as both rightist and leftist, it would seem that she is somewhere near the middle ground. Her membership lies mostly in the two major political parties, with perhaps a tiny sprinkling in the Socialist Party. The leaders of organized labor are prone to regard the Protestant Church as leaning toward the interests of the employing group from which the bulk of her support comes.

On the other hand it has become quite the vogue in some capitalistic circles to charge the Protestant Church with having a "pink fringe." Some of these charges are inspired by splinter church groups which are competing with the main Protestant bodies for financial support. Their statements are frequently echoed by secular writers.

The official pronouncements of the leading Protestant bodies, such as the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, make clear that the Church of God feels bound by her divine origin to hold herself above, and yet to sit in judgment on, all economic systems and political parties. She believes that within a common loyalty to Christ, her members may hold both liberal and conservative views as to methods of applying his principles to economic and political issues. By preserving such breadth and inclusiveness, the Church is a stabilizing rather than a divisive force.

### **What is meant by the much-mentioned American doctrine of separation of church and state?**

This is a large question with more facets than can be presented here.

Some of those who shaped America's institutions had come from lands where there were state-controlled churches, and others had come from countries where churches dominated the governments. They were determined that neither of those situations should be repeated here. Hence the separation of church and state is a doctrine dear to the American heart.

It means that civil government shall not discriminate against

citizens on the ground of their religion, nor interfere with church organization, nor dictate the message of the pulpit.

On the other hand it means that no church shall seek special privileges from the government, or enter into political relations with civil authorities, or dictate the policies of public officials.

The separation of church and state, however, should not be interpreted to mean the divorce of religion from civic life. We open our state and national legislative sessions with prayer and we require our presidents to take the oath or affirmation of office with their hands on the Bible. Officially America recognizes herself as a "nation under God."



## *The Forgiveness of Sins*

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"I believe . . . in the forgiveness of sins"

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### WHY BOTHER ABOUT OUR SINS?

In the early period of his popularity, Jesus came on one occasion to Capernaum. When it was noised abroad that this man with the magic healing power was in a certain house, there gathered a crowd so dense that the doors were blocked. In order to reach Jesus, a palsied man was let down through the roof by his friends. Our Lord confronted the patient with an unexpected greeting. He said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."<sup>1</sup>

That situation is deeply suggestive for our own day. The crowds now as then gather wherever there is hope of health or help. Yet with all this worthy effort to lift the burdens and banish the fears and worries of men, I believe Christ would stand among us and say, first of all, to us as to the man at Capernaum: "Man, your sins are forgiven you." Too many of us are trying to feel good without first trying to be good, seeking comfort before we seek forgiveness.

The late Sir Oliver Lodge said that sin is no longer a primary preoccupation of modern man. But even if we do not take time to think seriously about sin, the great thinkers of the ages have made it the burden of their weightiest thought.

<sup>1</sup>Luke 5:20.

Plato wrote of how sin sears the soul of the sinner. The stoics were greatly concerned with the problem of conscience. The great Hebrew prophets and singers voiced their agony of spirit in passages like this: ". . . I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare wrestled repeatedly with the problem of sin. And the most significant dramatist of our day, Eugene O'Neill, attained his stature because he was ever struggling with the basic questions of sin and destiny.

We bright little modern people may rush around, too busy to bother about our sins, but the stubborn fact of sin remains. In our sophistication we may soften the old word "sin" with new psychological terms and call it a complex, but the evil by any other name smells as bad. A little college in its desire to secure students from godly homes may seek to allay the fears of pious parents by advertising that its campus is "seven miles from any known form of sin!" But there is no home or campus so good that it is seven miles from the sin of pride or covetousness or envy or anger or sloth.

Sin is around us in so many forms that it defies description. Through heredity the sins of our ancestors cling to each new generation as a stubborn winter tries to stifle a struggling spring. In our environment the sins of evildoers surround us as the sea of troubles encompassed the soul of Hamlet. Deep in our own natures passions seethe with sinful tendencies and often erupt with volcanic force. Crime and corruption poison the springs of government, and in the international realm the biggest business of our day is to keep the sin of war from utterly destroying our civilization.

One clear cold March day I stood at the edge of Niagara Falls. The cataract was garbed in her most glorious winter garments. The rapids above the falls sparkled in the afternoon sun. Some birds were swooping down to snatch a drink

<sup>2</sup>Psalm 51:3.

from the clear water. My host told me how he had seen birds carried over the brink. They had dipped down for a drink and ice had formed on their wings. Then they had dipped for another drink and more ice weighted their little bodies. Another dip or two and they could not rise. Over the falls they went.

Sin is as deceptive as the sparkling water of Niagara's wintry rapids. Dip into it once too often and we are not able to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely."<sup>8</sup>

#### WHY CAN WE NOT FORGET OUR SINS?

Every Sunday in many of our churches the congregations confess in prayer: "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." When we feel truly sorry for what we have failed to do, we can redouble our efforts and try to make up for lost time and opportunity. But how about undoing the wrongs we have done?

We may be inclined to say at once that we cannot undo what has been done, so forget it. And here we come to one of the very important questions of successful living: when to go forward and forget and when to go back and remember.

It is folly to torture our minds with futile regrets over what cannot be changed. We must master the art of leaving if we are to master the art of living. Jesus made much of this point. He said once: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> And on another occasion he said to a man, "Follow me." The man replied, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus answered, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead."<sup>5</sup> As I understand it, that was Jesus' short, sharp, surgical enigmatic way of saying, "Let the dead past bury itself."

<sup>8</sup>Hebrews 12:1.

<sup>4</sup>Luke 9:62.

<sup>5</sup>Luke 9:59-60.

There are some parts of our past that should be left for dead. They cannot be changed. So do not dig them up. We must learn to know how to let bygones be bygones, how to close the gate on what should be forgotten, so that yesterday's pack of yelping worries do not keep hounding us to destroy today's peace of mind.

Most of us have a tendency to keep many things which should be left behind. When we move from one residence to another, we discover how many articles we have kept stored up which we shall probably never use but which we hate to throw away. We preserve many customs which no longer serve any useful purpose. Dorothy Canfield Fisher calls attention to the buttons sewed on the outside seam of men's coat sleeves, right back of the wrist. What are those buttons used for? Their usefulness disappeared with the last lace ruffles. A century and more ago gentlemen wore white ruffles at the wrists, and to keep them from being soiled they were buttoned snugly back. Now the buttons are still put on our coats—and most of us do not know why they are there.

This is a rather trivial illustration of our tendency to keep things which we no longer need. This trait can become very troublesome. Our minds are clogged with regrets and remorse, with grudges and grouches which should have been discarded. "Don't cry over spilt milk," is the old adage learned in our childhood. Leslie Weatherhead of London has given a more colorful translation of the same advice: "Don't follow your own hearse."

We need the courage to change what should be changed, the patience to endure what cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.

And wisdom should tell us that there is a difference between forgetting the evils done to us and forgetting the sins we ourselves commit. Suppose a reckless driver ran into my car last summer. The damage was done. The incident is over. I should forget it. It does no good to keep thinking

about it. But if I were the reckless driver who caused the damage, then that recklessness is in my own nature. It remains with me unless I get rid of it. If I do not care enough about my carelessness to correct it, I add to the sinfulness of it. Hence I must not try to bury my own wrongdoing in forgetfulness. If I do, I am likely to go on repeating the evil deeds. And when we go on sinning without qualms, we vitiate our very natures.

We cannot bury a live sin in the grave of forgetfulness—a truth which is now being stressed by modern psychology. When a patient suffering from a mental or nervous disorder goes to the psychologist, he is told not to forget but to remember. He is encouraged to talk out his troubles. The consultant digs back into memory, believing that if the roots of the complex can be found and brought to light the patient will be cured when he understands the origin of his difficulty, often comparatively trivial. Perhaps it was a sudden fright or a harsh rebuff experienced in childhood, the memory of which was repressed by an unconscious defense mechanism until it grew into a morbid complex. As soon as this is discovered and dragged into full light, it can be calmly faced and it loses its terror.

But moral failure or sin cannot be healed so easily. When a person has disobeyed his conscience, betrayed his ideals, tarnished his character, trespassed on others—these things do not lose their bad look when brought to light. They look worse instead of better. And the hope of cure lies in making them look so bad that the sinner turns from them in abhorrence and disgust.

#### WHY CAN WE NOT HANDLE OUR SINS OURSELVES?

Granting the seriousness of sin and our inability to bury it in forgetfulness, can we not take ourselves in hand and correct the evil without calling God into the situation?

Suppose that I have defrauded you out of a hundred dollars. You come to me and say: "I'll forgive you the debt. Forget it." That may seem to close the situation so far as we two persons are concerned. But it is not quite an adequate treatment of the matter, is it? It may leave me prone to do the same thing again inasmuch as I got off so easily this time.

Or suppose I am so mellowed by my creditor's forgiveness of myself that I go to a man who owes me fifty dollars and cancel his debt. Or perhaps we all went around our community forgiving the debts owed us. Such a procedure would not insure a stable and honest community. Justice requires something more than a clubbable atmosphere of mutual exoneration.

Or it may be that I have spread a false rumor regarding you and I ask your forgiveness. You generously grant it, saying, "Let bygones be bygones." Does that end the matter? No. For that rumor has already run beyond our power to recall. Someone who has heard the report may cherish a bad opinion of you the rest of his life. I can no more call back the influence of my sin than I can recapture my breath of five minutes ago.

Or let us say that I, through carelessness or ignorance, injured your little son and you, out of the goodness of your heart, said, "I forgive you." But the trouble is I can't forgive myself.

In Ibsen's drama, when Peer Gynt found himself among the trolls, the devilish spirits of Scandinavian folklore, he asked what was the basic difference between them and men. He was told that among men the motto was "To thyself be true," but that the motto of the trolls was "To thyself be enough." Following this seemingly pleasing principle of action, Peer Gynt went carelessly on with his unmoral conduct, not worrying about whom he hurt until his vaunted self-sufficiency brought him to the verge of ceasing to be a man.

We human beings are not sufficient unto ourselves in handling our sins. Martin Luther saw this when he said that forgiveness of sin is a knot which needs God's help to untie.

IS IT HONEST TO SEEK FORGIVENESS OF OUR  
DEBTS?

Some time ago a rather cynical friend said to me: "It is a pity that the churches cannot agree even on the Lord's Prayer. Some congregations say, 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,' while others say, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'"

The difference in translation indicates no serious lack of unity in the churches. Deeper thought reveals the value in the twofold version, for it serves to remind us that a trespass is a form of debt and indebtedness is a form of trespass. When I commit a sin somebody has to pay for it. When I fail to pay my debts, I trespass on the welfare of someone else. Our lives are so intertwined that any moral misstep of mine trespasses on the personality or property of another. When I break a moral law, it is not merely my own affair; it is as if I had dropped a valuable object of art in the house of another.

Some persons worry about their trespasses but are not concerned about their debts, for they do not translate one into the other. There are others who seem to think that our moral codes are just puritanical restrictions put over on us by our forefathers and that to break them is not a very heinous offense. Yet some of those same persons have a gentleman's code of honor and pride themselves that they pay their just debts.

Perhaps the first thought which flashes into mind is this: Why should a gentleman pray to have his debts forgiven? Why not pay them? Consider the description of Socrates' death as given in the closing section of the

"Phaedo." The last discourse of Socrates is over. The poison has been taken and its paralyzing effect is mounting toward the heart. The friends stand in agonized grief about the couch of the dying philosopher, when suddenly the great soul, lifting the covering from his face, says: "Crito, I owe a cock to Aesculapius. Let it be paid." Those were his last words, and what a sense of honor they symbolized. He went out like a gentleman with his debts paid.

Yet, had Socrates paid all his debts? Look a little further into this matter of our obligations. If we receive another's services or products, we are in debt to him. That is a plain form of indebtedness which everyone admits. If we commit a crime against life or property, we thereby incur a debt not only to the one wronged but to society. We go to prison and when our term has expired, we say that we have paid our debt to society. But have we fully made up for the loss of a useful member's services as well as for the cost of correction?

Or suppose that we have not committed a crime but merely indulged in a vice. That vice begets an atmosphere of impurity or licentiousness whereby someone else is weakened. The law does not step in to punish us, but nevertheless we have incurred a debt.

Or I may keep my vice or indulgence so personal and private that I seem to hurt no one else. I say to myself, "It is my own business what I do with my own body and time." But is it merely my own business? No. I am depriving society of the healthy service I am expected to render.

Moreover, even when we live at our best we are still debtors. We all live in some respects on the fruits of others' sacrifices. If our childhood was normal, none of us has paid his way to maturity. Those sleepless nights of mothers, those anxious hours of fathers, have seldom been fully paid for. We were started on the voyage of life by the tugs of parental love as a ship is nosed out of the dock by the little boats be-



fore its own propellers can begin to turn. When we got under our own steam, we sailed away all too often without turning to thank those who started us. A busy father whose boy is away at boarding school said recently that he often had to telephone his son to inquire why he did not write. Such is the thoughtlessness of youth—sometimes until it is too late to write. Then, like Thomas Carlyle as the tears gushed through his gaunt fingers after the death of his wife, we cry, "If I had only known, if I had only known." As we think of those who have loved and served us we feel disposed to cry, "Forgive us our debts."

Let us look beyond the family to society. Every day of our lives we enjoy privileges for which others have paid. This right to speak freely on matters of religion—who paid for that? The right to vote, to hold our houses free from unwarranted search, to educate our children without the intervention of any dictator—all these rights have been bought at a price. We did not, we could not, pay for them in our own strength. During World War I, Sir Gilbert Murray said that he went around the quadrangles of Oxford with a heavy heart because he was conscious that brave young men were dying for him in France. Every sensitive thoughtful person has some such feeling as he walks amid the securities and advantages of a land like America. Brave men have suffered and died to provide these.

The prayer for forgiveness of our debts is not "a beggar's refuge," as George Bernard Shaw once cynically said. Rather, it is a gentleman's confession.

#### WHAT HAPPENS IN CONFESSION?

The New Testament promise is: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>1 John 1:9.

Confession of sin is not a very popular note in contemporary preaching. The last few decades have seen a decided change of emphasis in our presentation of religion. Whereas the burden of preaching in our grandfathers' day was to save the hearers from their own sins, our modern congregations seem to want preaching which will protect them from the evils which others may inflict upon them. We are not half so worried about divine judgment as we are about social dangers. Hence we go to church not so much to confess our sins but to learn how to be safe in a society that threatens our persons and property, how to be relaxed in a world of strain and tension. We want to hear about Christ the Protector and Physician rather than about Christ the Savior from sin.

To be sure, Christ is a protecting Shepherd against the wolves of our world. The Christian faith and church are our best protection against communism and statism and the unruly elements which threaten peace and freedom.

And Christ is the Great Physician who calls to us: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>7</sup> His healing power is unlimited, and he does impart peace of mind and peace of soul. But with all our desire to appropriate Christ's protecting and healing power, we must not forget the gospel's statement, ". . . you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."<sup>8</sup> Christ's primary work is to bring us salvation from sin rather than safety from physical and social dangers. Christ came to make us good, not merely to make us feel good.

When we say that the popular presentation of religion tends to neglect confession of sin and salvation from sin, we do not mean that we should return to a depressing, frightening religion. We certainly would not suggest reviving the kind of sermons Jonathan Edwards preached, wherein he pictured sinners in the hands of an angry God, dangling

<sup>7</sup>Matthew 11:28.

<sup>8</sup>Matthew 1:21.

over the brink of a fiery hell. Men are not frightened into heaven by shying off from hell. Jesus did not present fear as the motive of salvation. We are not saved by the self-centered desire to be saved any more than by the modern popular desire to be safe.

In primitive times men sought in fear to placate God through sin offerings. But Jesus and certain of the great Hebrew prophets before him changed the atmosphere of divine judgment from a police court to a Heavenly Father's house. God is a Father, not hostile to us, not even angry with us, but eager for our reconciliation and redemption. What the gospel seeks to show and what we must get into our heads and hearts is that sin is a violation of love and not merely of law.

When a child in the home hurts his brother he hurts also his father, because the father suffers not only with the child that is hurt but also for the child that does the hurting. The father looks with loving compassion on both of them. He longs for their reconciliation. He is eager and ready to forgive the wrongdoer, but he cannot forgive until the sinner confesses and repents.

So with our Heavenly Father. He loves all his family, whether they live in America or India or Russia, whether their skins be white or black or brown. His heart aches over the quarrels and divisions and injustices among his children. He suffers with those who are sinned against and for those who do the sinning. He so loves them and longs for their peace and happiness that he "gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."<sup>9</sup> The cross is the revelation of our Heavenly Father's double hurt.

When we confess our sins, therefore, we are not trying to placate an angry judge and thereby lessen our punishment. We are responding to violated love and seeking to

<sup>9</sup>John 3:16.

comfort a suffering Father. And if we are not restrained by the fear of hurting one who loves us—that wife who has been our partner in sacrifice and suffering, that child who looks up to us and bears our name, that brother or sister who was our comrade in play and our standby in danger—if we are not restrained by the fear of hurting our Heavenly Father who doubly suffers for us, if we are not sensitive to wounded love, then we are headed toward hell.

When we see how deeply sin hurts both our fellow men and our Heavenly Father, if there is any spark of decency in us we confess our sins.

“For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.”<sup>10</sup> There is great value in putting our sins before ourselves audibly. “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire uttered or unexpressed,” and to be sure, we can pray silently at work. We can even go further and say that work itself may be prayer. But just as the home relations of husband and wife grow slack without some words of affection, so our fellowship with God needs words to keep it vital. We need to “unpack our hearts with words.”

Also there is a vital difference between joining in general confessions and singling out one’s own specific sins. It is one thing to run through the Lord’s Prayer, saying in chorus, “. . . forgive us our trespasses”; it is quite another to pray, “Lord, forgive my meanness to Mary, my words of gossip about George.” In courts of law conviction cannot be won on blanket indictments but on specific charges. Likewise, convictions of sin are best secured on specific confessions.

#### WHAT DOES REPENTANCE DO?

When we see our sins as ugly and repulsive, we must advance from remorse to repentance. It does not do any good

<sup>10</sup>Romans 10:10.

just to remember sins which we cannot undo. To sit and brood over them; to keep asking, "Why did I do it?"; to keep saying to oneself, "What a fool I've been"—all that is futile and gnawing remorse. Like a rocking chair, remorse and anxiety keep us moving but do not get us anywhere.

But when we bring God into the situation, he lifts us out of our self-centered and ingrowing remorse. He breaks the closed circle in which we sit alone with our sin, thinking of how it affects ourselves. It makes a great difference when a wayward boy stops thinking about how much he is going to suffer for his sin and begins to think how his bad deed is going to hurt his father and mother. When a boy begins to do that, he is on the way to repentance and recovery.

Recall the story of the Prodigal Son. When "he came to himself" in the far country of sin among the swineherds, his first thought was of what he had lost. He cried, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger!"<sup>11</sup> But his feeling shifted from himself to his father and then he said, "Father, I have sinned against . . . you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."<sup>12</sup> Thus we see him getting out of his self-centered misery into a filial concern for his father. He gets off the dead center of remorse and is moving on the road of repentance.

The conception of repentance comes from the Greek. But the Greeks did not look to their gods for much help in repentance. To them the wrongdoer sinned against nature and his own soul. But to the Hebrews, sin also involved the Deity. Let a simple situation illustrate the difference. Suppose you, by your careless or reckless driving, injure the property and person of another. If your thinking is like that of the ancient Greeks, you would say: "This has hurt the other person. It also hurts me. I am sorry. I shall try to repair the damage. It must not happen again." But if you

<sup>11</sup>Luke 15:17.

<sup>12</sup>Luke 15:21.

have caught the Judaeo-Christian point of view, you would say: "This has hurt not only myself and my brother it has hurt God also, for we are both God's children. We are here on God's work. Anything which hurts or hinders us disappoints and grieves God."

Sin is not a purely personal and social affair to be dealt with on the human level. It hurts God as well and calls for a reconciliation with him. And when Christ came, he quickened the spirit of repentance by revealing the kind of God whom we hurt by our sins. He shows us a Heavenly Father, personal and loving, who yearns for his prodigal sons. Also, Christ stirs us to repentance by living among men a life so pure and noble that alongside his virtues ours look like cheap stage jewelry brought into the sunlight. And then by his cross, Christ demonstrated what sin costs God.

When the life and love and death of Christ really sink home to our hearts, we advance from self-centered remorse to godly grief over our sins. Saint Paul drew the distinction when he wrote: ". . . godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death."<sup>18</sup>

#### HOW FAR CAN WE MAKE REPARATION?

"Godly grief" is good because it leads to reparation. When we wish to "make up with" someone we have wronged, we also desire to "make up to" him as much as possible of the damage we have done him. The sincerity of our desire for forgiveness is measured by our willingness to repay.

In *Hamlet* the guilty king's soliloquy is not so familiar as that of the young Dane but it is equally basic:

My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder!—  
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd

<sup>18</sup>2 Corinthians 7:10.

Of those effects for which I did the murder,—  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
May one be pardon'd, and retain the offence?

To that last question of the king there is an ingrained sense of justice in us which answers "No." However sorry we may be for our sins, if we want to retain the profit from them we are not truly repentant.

We must try to pay back all that we can. Jesus made that very clear. He said: ". . . if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."<sup>14</sup>

And in that repayment for damage, a truly repentant spirit is not niggardly "returning an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." He is like Zaccheus, who was so mellowed by Jesus' visit that he declared: ". . . the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold."<sup>15</sup> When Jesus beheld such sincere and generous desire for restitution, he said, "Today salvation has come to this house."

But when we set out to repay the wronged, we discover our limitations. When we think of the blessings God has given us and the poor use to which we have put them, when we think of the sacrifices made for us by those we have never fully thanked, when we think of the heartaches we have caused those whom death has put beyond our power to repay, when we think of all this we see that we cannot make full reparation.

With all good intentions we cannot undo all our wrongdoing. The sin I committed yesterday may have had an influence on someone I do not even know. The record of my sin stands. I cannot erase it. The scars left by my sin

<sup>14</sup>Matthew 5:23-24.

<sup>15</sup>Luke 19:8.

may still remain in my own body and on the lives of those I love. I cannot remove them.

Am I at the end of what I can do in my own strength? Yes. But not at the end of what God can do. Though I cannot justify myself by my works, I can turn to God for justification by faith.

#### HOW CAN WE BE RECONCILED TO GOD?

When we fully realize that sin is a violation of love as well as of law, we reach the point where lies the deepest hurt and also the highest hope. Love is one commodity which grows by consumption.

The Prodigal discovered that though his sin had taken him away from his father's house it had not cut him off from his father's love. That love was waiting for him with outstretched arms. Prodigals down the ages have found the same welcoming love, even on the human level. A man who has sinned against his wife and his children "comes to himself," perhaps too late to save his family from tragedy or disaster. Although he is truly penitent, he has no hope of forgiveness for he knows he does not deserve it. But to his great surprise, his family circle welcomes him back and surrounds him with affection. Far from harping on what he has done, they act as if he had never done it. Does that mean anything to him? It means everything.

In the state of New Jersey lived a man some years ago who was widely known for his honor and probity. His son committed a serious transgression. The news reached the father on a Sunday just before luncheon. He said nothing about it at the table but asked his son to meet him in his study later. There he said something like this: "My son, I cannot pass by your sin. It would be both wrong and morally offensive for me to do so. But I can and I will bear for you the ill-desert which judgment demands." Years



afterward in reporting the incident the son said that as his father uttered those words he seemed majestic in his dignity and melting in his love.

Thus a father identifies himself with his erring son. Thenceforth the old relationship is restored. And this reconciliation with the father changes the attitude of the son. No longer is he a sinner merely trying to escape the consequences of his sin. He wants to share with the father the burden of the wrong done. In Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Samson's father proposes to bring about the son's ransom. But Samson objects:

Spare that proposal, father: spare the trouble  
Of that solicitation. Let me here,  
As I deserve, pay on my punishment;  
And expiate, if possible, my crime.

The truly penitent sinner becomes reconciled to taking his just punishment. In a western state a husband killed his wife in a fit of passion. He was sentenced for life. Later he was converted and became a model prisoner. After some years friends suggested that he appeal for pardon. "No," he replied, "this is the only way I can show God and my Mary that I am truly sorry for what I did to her."

When the sinner feels that God is reconciled to him as a son and that he is reconciled to whatever God has for him to do, there comes "the peace of God, which passes all understanding."<sup>16</sup>

The Old Testament has a vivid figure descriptive of divine forgiveness: "I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you."<sup>17</sup> As the sun dries up a cloud, so God's forgiveness removes the cloud of misunderstanding between him and his sinful child. The sinner no longer feels himself "under a cloud." And gone is the sin which so beclouded his mind as to shut out the light of God's love.

<sup>16</sup>Philippians 4:7.

<sup>17</sup>Isaiah 44:22.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."<sup>18</sup> Some old scars of sin may remain but they serve as reminders of redeeming love and as spurs to greater goodness.

And those sinful habits which we could not break yield to God's redeeming power. He turns our thoughts from temptations to "whatever is true, whatever is honorable . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely [and] . . . gracious."<sup>19</sup> He drives out the love of evil with a greater desire for the good. Each little conquest in virtue helps to create in us a victory complex. Only God himself can count the host who, through his help, have broken the power of cancelled sin.

But what about the influence of our sins on others? It seems hard to know what God can do with it. But when we turn to God, we come to one who still controls all the influences of all individual lives. Through prayer we have a mysterious and immeasurable power of interceding for those we love. If they are within reach, God bids us follow our prayers with our service, making all possible reparation. And if they are beyond our reach—— Ah, who of us are not often disturbed by the thought of whether we did all we should have done for those who now have passed beyond the veil? Who does not long to get some message across to that mother whose heart we hurt or to that son for whom we did not have more time when he was here with us? Well, they are still in God's keeping and my faith is that through God's mystic power our prayers and love can still reach them.

#### CAN FORGIVEN SINNERS BE MADE OVER?

"You can't change human nature." That is the cynical remark which greets every new reform.

Even the best of people sometimes succumb to such skepti-

<sup>18</sup>Romans 8:1.

<sup>19</sup>Philippians 4:8.

cism. The prophet Jeremiah was once so depressed by the stubborn devilishness of his critics that he cried: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil."<sup>20</sup>

But such pessimism runs counter to our best philosophy. Professor William E. Hocking asserts that human nature is the most plastic part of the living world. "Of all animals, it is man in whom heredity counts for least, and conscious building forces for most. Consider that his infancy is longest, his instincts least fixed, his brain most unfinished at birth, his powers of habit-making and habit-changing most marked, his susceptibility to social impressions keenest. . . . To anyone who asserts as dogma that 'Human nature never changes,' it is fair to reply, 'It is human nature to change itself.'"<sup>21</sup>

And when we turn to religion for an answer, we find that while the great ethnic faiths have spoken ill of human nature they never despair of its possibilities. The Judaeo-Christian faith holds before men the promise of improvement toward the image of God. The prevailing attitude of the Old Testament prophets is in line with Isaiah's passage: "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."<sup>22</sup>

And after the Incarnation, Christ's power and love so fired the hope of redeeming human nature that the New Testament is luminous with promises of walking in newness of life. The follower of Christ is pictured as progressing from forgiveness to fulfillment. He is not only saved *from* sin but *for* service. In fact, it is the expulsive power of the new interest which drives out the old sin, as the rising sap in the tree pushes off the dead leaf.

Saint Paul addresses a group of his fellow Christians as

<sup>20</sup>Jeremiah 13:23.

<sup>21</sup>William E. Hocking, *Human Nature and Its Remaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), pp. 9-10.

<sup>22</sup>Isaiah 1:18.

if this transformation had already taken place: “. . . seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”<sup>23</sup> The figure of speech suggests the changing of an old garment for a new one. Suppose you see an overcoat which appeals to you. You buy it, saying, “I’ll keep my old coat and just wear this new one on special occasions.” But after you get the new coat, you seldom have an occasion which does not seem “special” enough to call for it! Why? Because once having the new garment, you lose respect for the old one. It looks shabby. Similarly, when the Christian puts on the “new man” displayed by Christ, the “old man” looks shabby.

The Christian principle is to “overcome evil with good.”<sup>24</sup> The attraction of goodness is the superior strategy in the overcoming of evil. Evil is to be driven out by good as the darkness is driven out by light, for, as we said earlier, evil is the absence of good as darkness is the absence of light. The best way to conquer a bad habit is not to set the teeth and focus the mind on the temptation to be fought. That only fastens the sinful thing more firmly in the imagination. The better way is to fill the mind with good ideas to displace the bad.

And then keep growing. The human mind cannot remain in balance. It is either growing or losing. At this point so much old-fashioned evangelism erred. Revival meetings were held. People were converted. And then so many of them became “backsliders.” (This is a word not often heard in city churches such as mine, perhaps because the members do not get far enough ahead to slide back!) Men may have an emotional experience of conversion and set their wills toward a new life, but that is not enough. The conversion of the will must be followed by a cultivation of the imagination, the reason, the tastes.

<sup>23</sup>Colossians 3:9-10.

<sup>24</sup>Romans 12:21.

If we are to follow Christ, we must keep his image ever fresh. That is why we need to worship, to hear the gospel story retold, to expose ourselves to the symbolism and the ritual which remind us of the Christ. Whatever captures the imagination controls conduct. Why, for instance, is it harder to walk a twelve-inch plank across a mountain ravine a hundred feet deep than to walk the same plank placed across a ditch five feet in depth? Because in the former case the idea of falling becomes steeped in fear and fixed in our imagination. Since imagination is so strong that it wins the campaign against will power, it follows that we must find ways of presenting Christ which put pictures in the mind and fervor in the feelings. The success of *The Greatest Story Ever Told* proves that it can be done.

And with the kindling of imagination must go increasing knowledge. Young people go through confirmation classes and join the church. Then they so often cease their study of the church's teaching. One of the weakest points of the Christian church is that it is not a studying church. Too many of us cannot give a reason for the faith that is in us, with the result that we have no answer when doubts or disasters assail us. The image of Christ must be renewed in knowledge, and no one ever becomes too wise to learn more about the unsearchable riches of Christ.

If we keep renewing the image of Christ in our imagination and reason, our tastes and emotional attitudes take on his qualities. The old drives and instincts of our human nature remain, but their direction is changed. An Augustine remains a man with passions, but they become channeled toward the city of God. A William Booth does not lose his pugnacious instinct but he becomes General William Booth of the Salvation Army, a gallant fighter against sin rather than a killer of sinners.

Hugh Price Hughes, long a mission worker in the London slums, was once challenged by a prominent agnostic to a

public debate. Mr. Hughes accepted with the proviso that each speaker should bring to the platform as exhibits a score of persons whose lives had been redeemed by their respective philosophies. The challenge went by default, and the debate was never held.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

**Are we to forgive those who have sinned against us even though they do not repent?**

Forgiveness does not become a completed transaction until it is received by a repentant wrongdoer. The Prodigal Son did not experience forgiveness until he came in contrition, but his father was ready and waiting to forgive while the boy was still in the far country.

Like our Heavenly Father we should have the spirit of forgiveness in our hearts waiting and eager for the first opportunity to show it. The willingness to forgive has a mystic power of making itself felt even across a void of silence and shows much ingenuity in awakening a repentant spirit in sinners. And on the other hand, the possibility of reconciliation is greatly lessened by the attitude which says, "I'll forgive him but let him make the first move."

**Do we not weaken moral law when we preach that our sins can be forgiven by simply confessing them?**

This charge has often been made and with seeming reasonableness. Most certainly it would make for laxity of morals if we assumed that we could have the slate wiped clean by merely telling our sins to God or to one of his ministers. But forgiveness is not so easy and simple.

When we confess our sins we must also turn away from them in repentance and show our sincerity by trying to make reparation as far as possible.

Also we need to remember that God's forgiveness of us is linked with our forgiveness of those who have sinned against us. Jesus taught us to pray: ". . . forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors."<sup>25</sup> When we are inclined to presume on God's easy forgiveness let us try to forgive those who have wronged us. We shall soon see that is not so easy.

### **Can a person be so fully saved that he is freed from tensions and temptations?**

I have never met such a person and I do not believe such perfect peace of mind is possible in this world. Even Jesus had to struggle with temptation from the wilderness all the way to Gethsemane.

To be sure, we can and should rise above the lure of lower physical passions. But after we have conquered the lower temptations, we have to confront the higher. Some persons boast so much of having no vices that they become prigs. Jesus had his hardest time with the Pharisees, who thought they were so good that they did not need him. A musician never reaches the point where he can stop practicing. Neither does a Christian.

The best of us have to make daily decisions. And most decisions involve some mental tension. Let us remember that the major service of religious faith is to give us strength to live with our tensions rather than an exit by which to escape them.

### **What do Protestants mean when they stress the doctrine of "justification by faith"?**

"Justification by faith" is New Testament doctrine and not merely Protestant. "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law."<sup>26</sup>

No person save One has ever attained perfection. The better

<sup>25</sup>Matthew 6:12.

<sup>26</sup>Romans 3:28.

we are, the more keenly we feel our shortcomings. Since our works can never fully measure up to God's law, are we to fall into despair? No. We believe that our infinitely understanding Heavenly Father judges us not by what we are at any given moment but by what we are becoming.

A wise father does not judge his ten-year-old son by the standards of a thirty-year-old adult. He makes allowance for his immaturity and impulsiveness. The father does not condone the lad's misconduct. He shows the boy where he is wrong and explains how he must strive to be better. But he does not keep the little fellow in an atmosphere of continual condemnation, which stifles confidence and future effort.

When a son comes to feel his father's patient understanding, he is freed from the sense of guilt which dogs his steps and the fear which drives him toward despair. Though sorry for his sins, his heart is lifted with hope because he has faith in his father and he trusts his father's faith in him.

Since our Heavenly Father as revealed by Jesus Christ deals with us in love and trust, we believe that, as his children, we are judged and justified by faith.

### Is there any unpardonable sin?

Yes, according to the gospels. Jesus is recorded as saying, ". . . every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."<sup>27</sup> Mark and Luke carry the same report.

To understand these words we must see them in their setting. While Jesus was healing by the power of the Holy Spirit, critics gathered around to heckle him. They jeered him and charged that he was working through the power of the Devil. Their ideas of right and wrong had become so perverted that they called good evil. Their spiritual perception had been so dulled that they did not recognize the power of God at work among them, and their consciences had become so callous that they were no longer moved by pure motives. Not stirred by goodness, they felt no remorse for their badness. Hence they

<sup>27</sup>Matthew 12:31.



turned not to repentance, and therefore they could not be forgiven.

The scriptural promise is: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins."<sup>28</sup> But when we continue in our sins until we lose the sensitivity of conscience and no longer confess and repent, we give God no chance to forgive us. Thus we commit the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit.

### What is the doctrine of "original sin"?

A child's nature is like a garden. The ground of a freshly plowed garden looks absolutely clean. But leave it untended and before long it is covered with sprouting weeds. Whence came those weeds? Their seeds lay buried in the clean brown earth, left there from previous growths.

So with the child who looks so pure in his innocence. The seeds of selfishness are in his nature. He is the center of his own universe, impelled by his imperious will to try to get what he wants when he wants it. This inborn predisposition to evil is what theologians call "original sin."

This initial perverted twist in his nature does not mean that the baby is to be blamed as guilty of sin. His deeds are not actual sins because they are not due to deliberate choice, but to his inevitable inheritance.

We are not born absolutely separate individuals. We are members of families and societies, with the seeds of previous generations planted in the soil of our natures. We inherit their weeds, but we also inherit their flowers. We are mysteries to ourselves and much more to others.

### How does God's forgiveness of my sins help those whom I have hurt?

This question shows the proper Christian spirit. The truly repentant person is more concerned to cure the suffering he has caused than to escape the punishment he deserves. And

<sup>28</sup> 1 John 1:9.

the effort to set right what he has put wrong will be a chastening and continuing task.

But he should not go about it in such a glum and self-accusing spirit that his gloom becomes almost as hard to bear as his guilt. The husband whose unfaithful conduct has been forgiven should work for his wife's happiness not only by his future fidelity but also by his cheerfulness. True love always feels that it owes more than it can ever pay. This feeling, however, should lead not to a mood of bankruptcy but to one of buoyancy. The sight of a redeemed loved one is a potent medicine for a broken heart.

## *The Life Eternal*

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"I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting"

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### IS DEATH A DISAGREEABLE SUBJECT?

The Apostles' Creed closes on the high note which is commonly called "Our Blessed Hope." Yet though uncounted millions through the centuries have been repeating in chorus, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting," we still commonly associate death with darkness. We speak of old age as the twilight of life. Even our hymns keep the symbolism of shadow:

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!

Or:

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide!

We have learned our Creed by heart, but we have not taken it fully to heart. We are too much like a certain host of Dr. Frederic Myers. When the table discussion veered to the subject of life after death, he tried to turn it aside, saying: "Of course, if you press me, I believe that we shall

all enter into eternal bliss; but I wish you would not talk about such disagreeable subjects."<sup>1</sup>

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "RESURRECTION OF THE BODY"?

The original wording of the Creed was, "the resurrection of the flesh." But the church later changed "flesh" to "body" in line with Saint Paul's teaching that "flesh and blood cannot inherit The Kingdom of God."<sup>2</sup> We know that our physical bodies return to earth. God does not gather up the dust of the decayed corpse and restore it to its earthly form. Paul declares that the body will be changed. "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body."<sup>3</sup>

The body is the vehicle in which personality is conveyed. This physical conveyance suited to our earthly surroundings will be replaced by one fitted for the realm of the spirit. What form that future body will take we cannot conceive, for we have no concepts in which to picture pure spirit.

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE "LIFE EVERLASTING"?

The gospels do not record that Jesus ever used the word "immortality." But some seventy times in the New Testament occurs the expression "eternal life," which connotes quality rather than quantity.

Mere succession of days and years might easily become intolerable. It was a theory of George Bernard Shaw that if the earthly span of years were lengthened from three score and ten to three hundred, then death would be looked on as a blessed escape. The devout Buddhist seeks release in the

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Frederick C. Grant, *Can We Still Believe in Immortality?* (Louisville: Cloister Press, 1944), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>1 Corinthians 15:50.

<sup>3</sup>1 Corinthians 15:44.

oblivion of Nirvana from the succession of births, deaths, and reincarnation.

Christ lifts us above the thought of time's measurements. He kept no diary. He is not dated by his words. They might have been spoken at thirty or at sixty. When we catch his Spirit, we are freed from the tyranny of time in which our present world holds us.

A little second thought shows the foolishness of time's enslavement. What is the present? We cannot grasp it. The moment we try to catch is already part of the past when it is caught. The present moment is just a flash made by the contact of past and future, and the more intensely we live, the less we note the ticks of the clock. Who does not know those hours in the presence of loved ones when we were utterly unconscious of time.

Josiah Royce quoted a letter from Mozart: " 'My ideas come as they will, I don't know how, all in a stream. . . . Well, if I can hold on to them, they begin to join on to one another. . . . And now my soul gets heated, and if nothing disturb me, the piece grows longer and brighter, until, however long it is, it is all finished at once in my mind, so that I can see it at a glance as if it were a pretty picture or a pleasing person. Then I don't hear the notes one after another, as they are hereafter to be played, but it is as if in my fancy they were all at once.' " <sup>4</sup>

An evangelist of my boyhood days tried to describe eternity in terms which struck terror to my young mind. She asked us to think of a bird coming to earth just once in a million years and carrying away just one grain of sand at a time. Then she said that when that bird had carried away this entire planet, eternity would be only begun.

Such a stupendous stretch of time is beyond my power to grasp. But experience has led me to conclude that the essence

<sup>4</sup>Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (Houghton, 1892), p. 457.

of eternal life is not endlessness but an intensity of quality which frees us from the hands of the clock and the clutches of the calendar.

Arthur George Heath fell in France during the First World War. With the premonition of death upon him, this Fellow of New College, Oxford, wrote his mother shortly before the end: "Life, in fact, is a quality rather than a quantity, and there are certain moments of real life whose value seems so great that to measure them by the clock and find them to have lasted so many hours or minutes, must appear trivial or meaningless. Their power, indeed, is such that we cannot properly tell how long they last, for they can color all the rest of our lives and remain a source of strength that you know cannot be exhausted, even though you cannot trace how its works."<sup>5</sup>

Of such moments I think when I say, "I believe in the life everlasting."

#### IS NOT HUMAN LIFE TOO BIG FOR THE BODY?

The human body is composed of earthly elements which can be chemically analyzed—carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, sulphur, and various salts. But the body is moved by a mysterious force called life, whose seat of action eludes precise location. It seems to be centered in the brain, for a clot of blood in the brain tissue paralyzes thought and action. But even if the brain be the seat of life, it is not the source of it. For the last several decades biological scientists have been swinging to the belief that the brain's function is transmissive rather than productive.

Chancellor Arthur Compton, Nobel prize winner in the field of physics, says: "It seems rather that the fact of free will demands that our thinking shall be partially independ-

<sup>5</sup>Charles W. Ferguson (ed.), *Great Themes of the Christian Faith* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), p. 140.

ent of brain activity, a conclusion which suggests, though of course does not prove, the possibility of consciousness after death.”<sup>6</sup>

And there is a still more convincing point which is plain to the man on the street without the aid of any scientist. This further fact is that through all our bodily changes, personality preserves its identity. In the process of growth bodily tissues, even brain cells, undergo complete renovation every seven years. In the course of a normal lifetime we use and use up several bodies, but individuality persists. Does it not, therefore, seem possible, even reasonable, that personality can survive the extreme bodily changes of the grave?

As Sir Oliver Lodge was quoted as saying, smashing the organ is not equivalent to killing the organist. And we might go on to add that killing the organist is not equivalent to stopping the music. A gallant young aviator, Goodrich White, Jr., was shot down over the Baltic during the last war. Among his many gifts was that of musicianship. He once said that he never listened to great music without the keen awareness that it stemmed from a much higher source than the man who was playing it, or even the man who composed it. The memory of that statement was of great comfort to his mother.

And well it might be, for it serves to remind us that there is a “givenness” in music which points to a source beyond the material instrument and even the human mind. Who puts the themes in the composer’s mind and the skill into the artist’s touch? Who provides the possibility of sound? With life it is as with music. Our physical bodies and our finite minds do not contain in themselves the conditions of their existence. We are not self-contained, self-starting or self-stopping. Our lives presuppose a vaster whole of which we are a part.

<sup>6</sup>Arthur H. Compton, *The Freedom of Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935).

Four years ago last Easter morning a little girl was born. On that first day she was flesh of her mother's flesh and blood of her blood. The tissues of her growing form have changed with time, and now there is much less of her mother's body in her; yet every day I see more and more of her mother in her.

Truly life transcends the limits of the body. A mother can be with her son in spirit on a battlefield a thousand miles from home. Not merely where we breathe do we live, but where we love. Since life is too big for the body, it would also seem to be too great for the grave.

#### IS HUMAN LIFE LIMITED TO THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE?

In Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* a letter is delivered at the local post office with the address: "Grover's Corners, Sutton County, New Hampshire, the United States of America, the Western Hemisphere, the Earth, the Solar System, the Universe, the Mind of God." A lad, looking out of the window and hearing this read at that little post office, said in awestruck tones: "What do you know . . . What do you know!"

We are such slaves to our senses that it is hard for us to think of realities beyond their reach. It is very difficult to break the habit of judging by appearances even though we should have learned to do so from the way we have enlarged the world of the eye. We can take the telescope and see beyond the eye to heavenly bodies of unbelievable magnitude swimming in illimitable space. And we can take the microscope and peer into a world perfect and complex as are the heavens yet invisible to the naked eye. For the Artist who created this universe not only paints panoramic sunsets and carves grand canyons but He makes miniatures in coral and mixes the colors in orchids and maps the courses of electrons.



This world is so vast beyond what we see that if we say there is no reality except what our senses can touch we are just ignorant bulls in the china shop of the science laboratory.

When we look at the surface of a calm ocean from the ship's deck, it seems flat as the floor. And we explain this by saying that we cannot see enough of the world's surface at one time to observe its rotundity. Exactly so. And it is the same with death: we cannot see enough of death at one time to judge it rightly. Neither for life here nor hereafter are our senses safe guides; they do not see enough.

Man is so much more than the sum of his five senses. "Feelings, purposes, values make up our consciousness as much as sense-impressions. We follow up the sense-impressions and find that they lead into an external world discussed by science; we follow up the other elements of our being and find that they lead—not into a world of space and time, but surely somewhere."<sup>7</sup> And because I believe with this eminent physicist that these invisible elements are an integral part of life and must lead somewhere, I am disposed to believe in the possibility and probability of a life beyond the realm of time and space.

#### IS THE UNIVERSE HONEST?

Our science has built itself on the basic assumption that the physical universe is reliable. The stars in their courses, the seasons in their recurrence, the electrons in their motions can all be counted on. But is this a universe which keeps faith with our physical calculations and our bodily appetites and then plays false to the invisible, yet equally integral, parts of life—"the feelings, purposes, values" of which Eddington speaks? Do we live in a world where there is air for the lungs and food for the stomach, but no answer to the deepest and highest hungers of the soul?

<sup>7</sup>Eddington, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

The integrity of the universe is at stake in this matter of immortality. If this is an honest world order, it must keep faith with man's whole nature. And this longing for life beyond the body and the grave is more than a belief which man has acquired; it is something planted in our very being.

It is a normal appetite. The healthy, not the morbid souls, believe it most and desire it most. It is love, not selfishness, which calls most loudly for the life beyond. A person might be content that his own career should end at death, but when he stands beside the bed of a loved one, he cannot say, "It does not matter."

Now, since ours is a law-abiding universe, then this normal, persistent, and seemingly God-planted hunger of the soul must have, somewhere, a satisfying response. Certainly the Creator, who guides through the trackless sky the unerring flight of the migrating bird, has not put in man a migrating instinct only to mislead him when he sets out for the larger home of his soul. If the Creator develops men with the mind of a Plato, the conscience of a Socrates, the genius of a Shakespeare, the character of a Christ, only to blow them away as leaves before the autumn wind, then our world is the worst of wastrels.

But physical science tells us that in this measurable world nothing is wasted. The light which seems to go out when the candle is extinguished really goes on through interstellar space.

Look at a great man. What is the most important feature in his make-up? Not the strength of his body or the brilliance of his mind, but the quality of his character. And it takes a lifetime to perfect character. The exercise and discipline of youth, the struggles, successes and failures of maturity, the memories and tranquility of age—these all go into the rounding of character.

Having spent such painstaking efforts in the process, will nature annihilate such values? No more than would Michel-

angelo have blown up the Sistine Chapel when its frescoes were finished.

DOES NOT A FATHER KEEP FAITH?

But the Christian's belief in immortality is not left to cold logic. The gospels portray a God who is not merely an energy-conserving Force but a child-saving Father. Jesus so lived that his followers felt more and more sure of God's fatherhood. He boldly declared that "He who has seen me has seen the Father."<sup>8</sup> And those who watched him most closely were convinced that they beheld "the glory of God in the face of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

When we hold belief in the fatherhood of God we gain unshaken confidence in his care of his children. We reason upward from our parental instincts. ". . . what man of you, if his son asks him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"<sup>10</sup>

God the Father does not give the stone of extinction to his children when their highest and noblest hunger asks for the bread of eternal life. The Heavenly Father would not let the children of his love drown in the sea of nothingness when they reach out their hands in longing for life. If Jesus, the noblest character that ever lived was fooled, if the Creator has tricked thousands of generations of Christians who died in the faith of Christ, then how can we trust the reason, the logic, the sense of justice which are in our own minds? Yet for our daily living we do trust them. We have to do so in order to live. And the more faithfully we obey the highest that we know, the more firmly we feel that God the Father keeps faith with us.

<sup>8</sup>John 14:9.

<sup>9</sup>2 Corinthians 4:6.

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 7:9-12.

## WHAT WILL THE FUTURE LIFE BE LIKE?

Christ did as much for our belief in immortality by his interpretation of it as by his confirmation of it. He "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."<sup>11</sup>

While primitive man believed in a life beyond, his conception of it was pretty ghostly, and sometimes ghastly. Among some there was fear of the dead. The living were often oppressed by the thought that the dead might return. Sacrifices and offerings were resorted to in order to keep the dead content in the abode of the spirits. The Greeks were too intelligent to accept this bizarre picture. Hence they reduced their portrayal to that of a shadowy and bloodless realm.

From these dismal prospects Christ delivered men. As one church father expressed it, Christ turned our sunsets into sunrise. One of the imperative needs of the Christian church is to revive and spread the clearer concepts of the future life as given by Christ.

The traditional pictures of the hereafter as reflected in many hymns and sermons make it hard for intelligent persons to believe in heaven or to desire it. The conception of heaven as the place of perpetual harps and crowns is a mental projection of those whose idea of bliss is rest and play and glory. If rest and play, then the harp; if glory and honor, then the crown. But how intolerable would be an infinite continuance of rest and play and glory-seeking! As said one good friend of mine, himself a minister, he would be impelled to cry "Move on" to any saints who persisted in playing their harps under his window for a million years!

From such materialistic conceptions of the hereafter Christ delivers us. There is no physical environment which, in time, would not prove tiresome to us, who are ever building new houses and moving to new places. But the heaven of the Christian hope is a spiritual realm.

<sup>11</sup>2 Timothy 1:10.

And we find it difficult to make the region of the spirit real to minds like ours, which live immersed in material things. It is as if we tried to describe Southern California to Eskimos who had never been beyond the snowy ranges of Alaska. We would have to talk mostly in negatives. We could tell the Eskimos that Southern California is a place where there is no ice, no midnight sun, no whale meat. But would such a description be satisfactory to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce?

Similarly, in trying to give a preview of the hereafter we have talked largely in negatives. There will be no night there, no tears, no dying. Since flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, we say that “. . . if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”<sup>12</sup> But all this is rather hard to make real and appealing.

Jesus did not indulge in any detailed descriptions of eternal life. But he did say, “. . . I go to prepare a place for you.”<sup>13</sup> And on the basis of such a promise one can project some assumptions. Heaven is the kind of realm wherein Christ would feel at home.

Since Jesus Christ showed his love for the beautiful things of earth, we can believe that there will be beauty yonder, the loveliness of the simple and the genuine such as he said surpassed Solomon in all his glory.<sup>14</sup>

Since Christ was the Great Teacher, who said, “. . . you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,”<sup>15</sup> we can expect heaven to be a school where we shall learn the truth about ourselves, where the meaning of our mysterious misfortunes and tragedies will be cleared, where we shall know even as we are known—a thought to give us pause, for it means that we shall be seen for what we are, for our character and not our reputation, for our worth and not our wealth.

<sup>12</sup>2 Corinthians 5:1.

<sup>13</sup>John 14:2.

<sup>14</sup>Luke 12:27.

<sup>15</sup>John 8:32.

And along with beauty and truth will be the other ultimate value, goodness. Not the pale anemic piety which is often mistaken for real goodness, but the ruddy, rugged varieties of virtue which are creative and challenging. The good life, as Jesus taught it, is not a strait jacket to restrain our vitality but an adventure to summon and release our strength.

If heaven is the sphere of the vital good life, then we may expect growth there. Life is either growing or dying. It cannot be static. The more I study the gospels the more I think of our passage to the next life as through a schoolroom rather than a courtroom. Eternal life is the extension of the courses we have taken here. God gives us the chance to go on but he does not change the rules of the school. If we have not learned much of good in this life, we shall have to start the next life without much of good. If we have not learned to like what Christ liked, then we shall not be at home in the place which he said he has gone to prepare for us. In short, we shall be in what to us is hell. But if we have learned to live with the true, the beautiful, the good, and to like what Jesus liked, then death is the door to a life infinitely larger than this, to a realm immeasurably richer than earth.

To think of death as the passage through a schoolroom rather than a courtroom does not do away with divine judgment. We have discussed our belief in a future judgment (Chapter IV). If we have risen to the concept of sin as a violation of love even more than of law, then we realize that there is a pain of loss even more poignant than the pain of sense. The suffering of a broken heart is infinitely worse than that of a broken leg. The smoldering fire of frustrated love is harder to bear than the scorching flash of an exploding stove. Since the hereafter is a realm of the spirit, its punishments will be spiritual—the aches of loneliness, the fires of remorse, the tediousness of frustration, the burning shame of being shown to our loved ones for what we really are. But

since God is a Father, we believe that his punishments are ever for the purpose of redemption.

And, of course, the Christian assumes love in the hereafter. God is love. Christ craved comradeship. Man is made for fellowship. Hence life without a certain togetherness would not be worthy to be called living. We can understand the longing back of the Yorkshire collier's prayer: "O God, send me to hell if you like, but give me my son." Certainly our Heavenly Father understands such a human father's heart.

#### HOW CAN WE OVERCOME THE DREAD OF DEATH?

Here we should beware of those glib and easy phrases which frequently flow from the pulpit, perhaps including my own, without much healing force. There is a certain inevitable loneliness involved in the loss and leaving of loved ones. The undertaker may make the departed look as if in slumber, but there is no mortician's art which can transform the fact of death into the lightness of sleep. And those who would bring comfort in the hour of death must not make light of it.

There is a normal and necessary love of life and there is an instinctive avoidance of death. Otherwise we would not struggle to do the work of the world and bear "the ills that flesh is heir to." We would walk out on our earthly jobs whenever the going grew hard.

The Master of Life kept the will to live, unshadowed by the dread of death. His triumph over death lay not merely in the fact that he emerged from the tomb but also in the way he entered it. He did not spend much time discussing death. Yet he did not avoid the subject as if it were distasteful. He walked consciously into the face of death for he knew the cross awaited him in Jerusalem. But the shadow of death never darkened the sunny radiance of his countenance. On

the night before his crucifixion he said to his disciples, “. . . be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”<sup>16</sup> So unfurrowed was his countenance that his followers could not believe he was about to die. Jesus walked to the brink of death and then took the plunge as the graceful diver leaps from the high springboard, trusting the buoyancy of the water beneath him.

Let us then approach this matter of death by an earthly parallel. Suppose we knew that next year we were to move to Malaya for our future home. We have never been there. It is to us a strange country. We think it cannot possibly have the comforts and conveniences of America. Therefore, in order to make the life over there livable, we will box up as many of our possessions as possible and ship them with us. That is one way of preparing for our future living in Malaya.

And that is precisely the way primitive people tried to prepare for the last long journey of the dead. In the museum at Cairo one can see the marvelous collections of exquisite equipment which the Egyptian rulers like Tutankhamen placed in their tombs for their enjoyment of the future life. Likewise with the American Indian were buried his weapons for his use in the happy hunting ground.

But modern man recognizes the futility of such naïve preparations. He knows that he cannot take the things of earth with him into the hereafter. Aware that he will be deprived of the material things in which he lives and moves and has his being here, he cannot think of life anywhere being interesting without them.

But there is another way in which we might prepare to move our home from America to Malaya. We can say: “Let us not try to take our American things with us. Let us learn how to live in oriental fashion. Let us acquire some Malayan tastes. We shall fit ourselves to be at home with our new neighbors.”

<sup>16</sup>John 16:33.



And this suggests the way Christ tried to prepare his disciples for death. He said, “. . . lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”<sup>17</sup> We know what those are, for he showed them to us. Store our natures with those elements which belong to the Kingdom of Heaven within us as described by Christ. Cultivate the taste for spiritual satisfactions. Look on the things that are invisible and eternal until they become even more real and desirable than the things that are seen and temporal. We are to set our hopes not on the uncertainty of earthly riches “but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good . . . laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.”<sup>18</sup>

We say of certain persons that “they are full of life.” We mean that they abound with vitality, they radiate energy, they kindle the spirits of others. Such fullness is more than physical. I think of a man who is just about the healthiest animal I know and also just about the dullest person I know. On the other hand I have friends who are physically frail and yet they are full of spirit.

Christ came to make men alive to the things that last, to the ultimate values of beauty, truth, and goodness, to the joys of mind and heart, to the laughter of little children, to the love of innocence and purity. He came that men “may have life, and have it abundantly.”<sup>19</sup> And when we fill our lives with the interests he liked, we have that which we can take with us.

Some sixty years ago a visiting preacher at an eastern university took for his text one Sunday morning, “I am the door.”<sup>20</sup> He pictured life as a series of rooms leading one into the other, from home to school, from school to college, from college to business. What then of the end? Life seems

<sup>17</sup>Matthew 6:20.

<sup>18</sup>1 Timothy 6:17-19.

<sup>19</sup>John 10:10.

<sup>20</sup>John 10:9.

to bring us at last only to a blank wall. But there stands One, saying: "I am the door."

Twenty-five years later that same minister's son had become one of the foremost medical scientists of his generation. In the mid-forties he was stricken with inoperable cancer and for eighteen months he looked death in the face before he died. One of his medical colleagues has described the experience of his friends who visited him:

"The proof of a man's life may often be found in the manner of his facing death. . . . Those who were fortunate in seeing him during those eighteen months when he and death sat face to face—who dreaded their visits and came out gladly and inspired with a new faith in the nobility and courage to which rare men can attain—those know that the ugliness and cruelty of death were defeated. Death had no triumph, and he died as he had lived—with patience and love and submission in his heart, with the simple faith of a trustful child and the superb gallantry of a great soul."

That doctor was victor over death.<sup>21</sup>

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

Will the little child who dies before baptism go to heaven?

We might say "No" and give as proof the statement of Jesus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."<sup>22</sup> But it would seem to me that such citation smacks of the scribal

<sup>21</sup>The reference is to the late Dr. Francis W. Peabody of Boston and was given to the author by Dr. Charles W. Gilkey.

<sup>22</sup>John 3:5.

literalism which Jesus so often denounced. He rebuked those who rested their legalistic interpretations on the letter of the law. After catching his Spirit, Paul said, ". . . the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life."<sup>23</sup>

For the answer to the question we should go back to the Spirit of Christ and the Heavenly Father whom he revealed. It is hard to think of a little child who, through no fault of his own, dies before baptism being rigidly excluded from heaven by the Christ who said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God."<sup>24</sup>

While the seeds of "original sin" are in the nature of the newly born child, we do not believe that God imputes guilt to any individual until he reaches the age of responsible choice. Some large and respected branches of the church hold that baptism should be postponed until the age of personal responsibility has been reached.

Personally, I believe in infant baptism because it is the rite which symbolizes the reception of "the renewing and restraining influence of the Holy Spirit," and this the child needs from the very start. Furthermore, at the baptism of a little child both the church and the parents are made more vividly aware of their responsibility. Nevertheless, I do not believe that our loving Heavenly Father puts an unbaptized baby beyond the pale of his Kingdom.

### **Does belief in immortality tend to lessen our work for a better world here?**

Some sincere social reformers say that it does. Also that is the charge which the Communists made against the Russian Orthodox Church in the day of the czars. They condemned religion as the opiate of the people and said that the church was trying to soothe the oppressed and poverty-stricken masses by offering them "pie in the sky by-and-by."

It must be admitted that religious faith has sometimes been regarded as an avenue of escape from the world rather than as a force for improving society. Also, parties in power have

<sup>23</sup>2 Corinthians 3:6.

<sup>24</sup>Luke 18:16.

sometimes used and encouraged religion as a sedative to keep people quiet under unsocial conditions.

But by and large the belief in immortality has been an immeasurable stimulant for social welfare. It enhances the value of the individual. When men are regarded as possessed of immortal souls, they cannot be treated cheaply and carelessly. Those who have the care of children realize that they are shaping lives for eternal living.

When we are working in an enduring medium such as marble, we apply more painstaking effort than if we were constructing a snow man which would melt with tomorrow's thaw. When Saint Paul appealed to his fellow Christians to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,"<sup>25</sup> it was on the ground that "in the Lord [their] labor is not in vain."<sup>26</sup>

### Should we pray for the dead?

Yes, if we pray in the right spirit and ask for the right things. When loved ones leave us to live in other cities, we keep them in our prayers. Since we believe that those we call dead are still living in the spirit realm, why should we not keep our links of love with them through prayer and God's good grace?

We should avoid certain errors which easily creep into prayers for the dead. It is vain to think that by petitions and offerings the living can lessen or cancel the post-mortem judgments of God. It is at this point that the practice of praying for the dead has been perverted and even commercialized. We who believe in justification by faith must trust our Heavenly Father's justice and mercy in his dealings with each of his children. But we can pray that our dear ones may have fortitude in enduring whatsoever the Father decrees.

We like to talk about our dead with those who knew them. If your son was killed at the front, you seek out his squadron mates to hear all about him. By the same logic of love, you naturally like to talk with the Heavenly Father who was with your boy when he fell and is with him now.

<sup>25</sup>1 Corinthians 15:58.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

A mother of my acquaintance finds that when she talks to her departed son, she feels nearer to God. And she is not morbid about it.

**Does not the church stress the hope of heaven and the fear of hell in order to make people be good?**

Unquestionably the thought of future rewards and punishment is a factor in controlling human conduct. There is an inevitable element of self-preservation in us. We want to live here. We want to live hereafter. But if we try to be good merely because we want to get to heaven, we are missing the point of Christ's teaching about salvation. He said, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."<sup>27</sup> We are to forget ourselves in our goodness if we are to find happiness here or in heaven.

Yet note this: it is not selfish for me to be concerned about my child or my neighbor reaching heaven. If I am a good father or friend, I crave for my loved ones the largest and most lasting happiness. Hence for their sakes I desire so to live before them and with them that I may lead them in the way everlasting.

Thus the belief in heaven and hell, instead of being motivated by self-interest, becomes a deeply social doctrine. This is the note which the more enlightened churches are stressing.

**My daughter died when she was four years old. That was over thirty years ago. Will she still be a little girl when I meet her, or will she be grown-up?**

It would be presumptuous to answer this question with dogmatic certainty. With our finite minds we simply do not know.

At Dartmouth College stands a building called Dick Hall's house. It was erected in memory of a lad who died in 1917. In the house is a book containing an inscription written by one father to another. It reads: "To Edward K. Hall, in recollection of his son and my son, who have the privilege by the grace

<sup>27</sup>Matthew 10:39.

of God to be boys through all eternity. [Signed] Calvin Coolidge."

To me there seems a validity in the conviction President Coolidge expressed. While I believe that life involves growth, I do not think that growth in the heavenly realm means those changes which we associate with "growing up" in this world. Since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,"<sup>28</sup> we must divorce our ideas of life and growth from physical measurements.

But this I do firmly believe: family love will find continuance in the hereafter.

**I am so anxious about my husband. He does not attend church with me. In fact, he says he does not believe in God. I love him and cannot endure the thought that we shall be separated in the life beyond. What am I to do?**

If we believe in divine justice as taught in the Bible, we cannot take a light and easy view of such a situation. Scripture gives no warrant for softening the idea of future separation entailed by differences of life and belief. In this life we experience strain and separation when sin and disbelief split family circles.

But the justice of God promises happiness to the good quite as clearly as punishment to the bad. And we may well ask how a devoted wife or mother can be happy in heaven if the object of her love is beyond her reach in hell. Certainly it would seem that a just God must give a good wife the happiness which goes with serving her loved one, even though he be a sinner.

If we are to understand the ways of love and justice in the hereafter, we must free our minds from the spatial ideas of heaven and hell as separate regions. I believe that the good will still be near enough to see and serve their beloved—that will be, in part, their heaven. The bad will be near enough to see the love and goodness which they have spurned—that will be, in part, their hell.

And where there is life there is possibility of growth.

<sup>28</sup>1 Corinthians 15:50.

### Does memory continue in the life after death?

If life goes on, it would seem necessary to assume that memory does also. What would life be without memory and hope? The treasures of memory enrich life here, and my belief is that they will be a factor in heavenly living.

But how about bad memories? To the unforgiven the remembrance of past sins will be part of the hellishness of life hereafter just as it is here. In the case of forgiven souls, God does not erase all the memories and marks of past sins but he can transform the scars of sin into aids toward future goodness.

### How can we explain death to a child?

Expert authorities in child psychology assert that a baby has no comprehension of death until he is four years old, because before that age there is no understanding of motionlessness. Not until he reaches his twelfth year does the child completely surrender his belief that objects have life and purposefulness. Hence full understanding of lifelessness cannot come until at about twelve, when the child becomes able to comprehend abstractions. So we are told by those who should know.

But why try to explain death as lifelessness if we believe in immortality? The departed are away from us but they are alive somewhere. The child, of course, will ask "Where?" To answer that the mother he has lost has gone to be with God is too vague to satisfy. But Jesus is a person whom the child has seen in pictures and learned to know through stories. The little fellow can vividly imagine his mother in the place where Jesus is. He can talk to her in his prayers and even think about her in his play. All this can be natural and not morbid.

Love is the best language in which to translate the meaning of death to a child. By loving companionship we can ease the heartbreak in the hours of loneliness, we can fill up the gaps of affection, we can keep the departed a living presence in thought and conversation. Even though there is one less chair at the table the family circle is still as large. Usually the child grasps this truth better and faster than the grownups, and, like

Wordsworth, we often find our faith reinforced when children talk to us of death.

### Can we receive communications from the dead?

Volumes have been written on the findings of psychical research. Many citations seem very convincing. Several of my friends whose judgment I highly respect have told me of amazing experiences which led them to believe they had received messages from loved ones beyond the veil.

I believe that at times our spirits may become so in tune with the Infinite that their range of communication far transcends the limits of our physical senses. To me it seems very probable that there are moments of awareness when the spirits of our beloved flash their messages to us, "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses."<sup>29</sup> How much they know about what we do here, it is futile to conjecture.

If our departed dear ones wish to communicate with us, I feel sure they would not resort to tipping tables and commercializing intermediaries.

It is communion rather than communication which we should seek with the dead. Sir William Ramsay, the eminent and reserved scholar, once talked to a friend of mine, Dr. William P. King, about the son he had lost in World War I. Sir William said: "The communion with that son is spiritual communion. That son is with me more than all the other children. He does me more good than the others, for I feel that I must be always ready to meet him."

The James A. Gray Fund was established at the Divinity School of Duke University in 1946 as a part of the Methodist College Advance of the North Carolina Conferences of the Methodist Church. The purpose of the fund, in the words of the donor, is to expand and maintain the educational services of the Duke Divinity School in "behalf of the North Carolina churches and pastors, particularly rural churches and pastors." In partial fulfillment of this purpose the Gray lectureship was established.

<sup>29</sup>Hebrews 12:1.









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